MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Albanian Media Institute
Instituti Shqiptar i Medias

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Editor: Remzi Lani

Layout: Bujar Karoshi

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MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

Although, in a broader sense, both NGOs and media are considered part of the civil society, in reality each of them has an independent existence and live a complex relationship. There are numerous civil society organizations in all Balkan countries, but overwhelmingly they are not seen as an active and thoroughly influential actor in domestic affairs. Civil society organizations and efficacy of their activity still face a lack of trust among Balkan public, while civil society itself seems to be often politically divided. NGOs are also invariably dependent on foreign funding, often lacking sufficient financial and human resources. As Frank Hantke, director of Friedrich Ebert Foundation office in Tirana notes in his observations on civil society and public participation: "If democracy is largely nurtured and developed from outside only (through experts, consultants or even political pressure from other countries) it has nearly no chance of long-term survival. There are unfortunately already too many examples. Top-down democracies remain mostly thin facades while bottom-up democracies assure a more sustainable development."[1]

On the other hand, all Balkan countries present media landscapes that are overcrowded, chaotic, non-transparent, where clientelism has become a chronic disease and self-censorship is now the norm. Although both media and NGOs subscribe to the same set of values: freedom, democracy, public participation, access to information, transparency, the relations between them oscillate between love and hate.

Media coverage on civil society is often superficial and politicized. It is limited to broadcasting some footage from the seminars or conferences, or in the political use or misuse of some paragraphs from the research and studies of civil society. Civil society organizations are often demonized from the media as a bunch of people, supported by the West, who swim in money. On the other hand, civil society organizations often view media as PR agency for their activities, as opponents, and not as their allies.

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[1] F. Hantke, "Civil society <-> Democracy <-> Civil society organizations (NGOs)."

Based on these observations, the Albanian Media Institute, with the support of Council of Europe and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, initiated a regional research in six countries of Western Balkans, seeking to explore the relation between media and civil society. The research was conducted based on a common methodology in six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The main aspects analyzed in each country include the media sector, the status of civil society, the way media covers civil society, the perception of civil society sector of the media, civil society representation in public media bodies, the hybrid between media and NGOs, and the status of public participation of citizens as influenced by media and civil society sector. The following sector attempts to summarize the main observations noticed in each country along these lines, while each country report includes a more detailed information on the state of affairs.

Media sector: between politics and business

Different monitoring reports and press freedom indexes point to a continuous erosion of media freedom in the region, or, in the best case, to its stagnation. Legal framework is almost universally seen as conducive to media freedom in most countries. In the same way, problems with its implementation are also visible in each and every country of the Western Balkans, reflecting the weakness of institutional mechanisms to guarantee adequate implementation of the laws.

Although each country has specific traits of the media landscape, overall the media landscapes are marked by oversaturation of media markets, pointing to decade-long suspicions on the ability of media outlets to survive in such small markets. These concerns are highlighted by lack of transparency in media ownership, in its funding scheme, and on the respective role of government and commercial advertisers on editorial standards.

In fact, politicization and tabloidization are among the key terms mentioned in each country report to describe the media scene. Journalists find themselves under double pressure of the government and of the media owners, steering them constantly and further away from public interest reporting. Unpunished physical attacks and threats, along with legal lawsuits and closure of programs, do not help and self-censorship is a pervasive phenomenon in all countries under review. The weak power of associations of journalists and sometimes the lack of professionalism on their part are also part of the overall problem.

As a result, a deep polarization is viewed in most countries in the media scene, mainly in political terms, but sometimes also based on ethnicity. Media

communities are increasingly divided and most of the time viewed as part of the businesses they promote and protect, and increasingly less as part of the efforts to further public interest.

Civil society sector: a long way home

The landscape of civil society sector in the country is rich and diverse. In each country there are numerous organizations registered, sometimes considered excessive compared to the size of population. Similarly, in the best case, in each country about half of these organizations are active and persevere in their work. The nature of organizations working in the third sector seems also to be of two kinds: ranging from small, poorly equipped, and weak organizations working at the local level and targeting their specific community, to larger organizations, working at the national level, with a certain degree of influence on policy formulation and able to establish a dialogue with the government.

The legal environment for civil society organizations seems to be generally enabling, at least on paper. Legislation in most countries facilitates free and independent activity of civil society organizations. However, in some countries, such as Macedonia or Kosovo, the legislation is unclear or changes frequently, affecting negatively the environment for work of NGOs. In addition, even though the legislation is generally good, in some countries there is tension in the relations between government and civil society representatives, which is indicative of the democracy deficit in the region. In Montenegro there are reports of surveillance cases on civil society, as well as legal threats and intimidation from the government. The situation is even tenser in Serbia and Macedonia, where the civil society is exposed to harsh criticism and attacks both directly from the government and from the pro-government media. Civil society actors are increasingly being perceived as traitors of national interest, working only for their personal interest and that of foreign actors.

Public trust in civil society remains low even in other countries. This is due to different factors, such as inability to influence policies, lack of dialogue between civil society and governments, and inability to communicate to the public and the media their work. In recent years the civil society has been very influential in countries like Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to some extent Albania, in mobilizing public in peaceful protests against government or demanding particular policies or actions from the government. In smaller countries, like Kosovo and Montenegro, the perception of civil society tends to be better, where leaders of the civil society sector are viewed as having a more solid integrity and capable of influencing public discourse and policy

agenda. Nonetheless, all over the region civil society actors have managed to have only a limited impact on activism through all these years and generally their actions are perceived of limited impact from the citizens in these countries.

Civil society organizations' activity is sustained by two sources of funding: government funds earmarked for civil society and foreign donors. While in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina the funding is mainly available from public institutions, in most of the region the sector is heavily dependent on foreign donors. Either way, the funding scheme seems to be problematic: the funds stemming from central or local government are being cut as result of the economic crisis and are also a source of concern for independence of the sector; on the other hand, the decreasing interest of foreign donors in the region has also posed sustainability challenges for the civil society in the countries of Western Balkans.

Coverage of civil society in the media

Presence of civil society in the media reports is diverse in each country and is inextricably linked to the overall political context and dynamics and the power relations between civil society, media, and government. What seems to be a common thread, though, is that the coverage is, at its best, frequent, neutral, and limited to report of current events and activities related to civil society, lacking follow-up of the stories and a deeper analysis of the phenomena. Even in countries where there was a more frequent and positive coverage of civil society in the media, it rarely tended to go beyond reporting on specific events, press conferences, and so on. While civil society representatives are invariably quoted as sources of information in most countries, another common tendency is for the coverage to include only one source of information, namely just the civil society actor, rather than balance it with public official sources to enable the reader to have a more balanced judgment on the public policy issue at stake. Even in countries like Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the press coverage seemed to be more active and positive vis-a-vis the civil society sector, in most cases the stories covered lack a background, context, and other sources of information that would complete the picture for the public.

While in some countries, like Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, the civil society sector had a good visibility, not only in terms of space, but also of prominence in newspapers, the other extreme were countries like Macedonia and especially Serbia, where presence of the civil society is negligible or even hard to detect. This is in line with the political

regimes established in the last two countries, where the government seems to control great part of the media, leaving little space for alternative voices that might oppose the government. As a result, the public perception on NGOs in these countries might be heavily distorted, receiving only the negative and often "commissioned" coverage on NGOs, rather than any information on positive work they do. For example, the Serbian report highlights that even though civil society is very active in providing recommendations in the country's negotiation process with EU and many of the recommendations have been accepted, the public is totally unaware of this contribution and only views the civil society organizations as "public enemy."

Part of the explanation for the insufficient or biased coverage of the civil society sector lies in the ties between government and media, as well as on the fast news production that dominates the current media scene in all countries. However, most reports also identified a lack of cooperation between media and NGOs and especially the inability of civil society organizations to communicate properly and in an interesting way for the media on their work as the main culprit. Other reasons identified for the poor coverage on civil society also included the existing feeling of distrust between media and NGOs in some cases, as well as perceived politicization of NGOs, often leading to smear campaigns, especially during electoral campaigns or other significant events.

On a more positive note, the media in most countries in the region has become an ally of civil society organizations in relation to marginalized groups, most visibly LGBT community. Although some online media display hostile tendencies towards this community, most traditional media has had a very good cooperation with organizations working in this field, resulting in a generally positive and active coverage in the media of this community, sometimes even opposing conservative political statements.

Media under the perception of civil society

Civil society seems to be divided on whether the media is their ally or their adversary, especially in countries where government control over media is more visible and where political divisions in the society run deep. All respondents in all countries linked continuously increased politicization of the media to decreasing attention and interest for civil society actions. In addition, a direct link was established in the interviews between the editorial policy of the media outlets and the access granted to civil society: if the actions of the non-government organizations did not affect particular parties or political figures and were in line with the editorial policy of the media outlet, the action received satisfactory coverage and public awareness

was possible. If that was not the case, the action was ignored, at best, or the organization became target of media criticism.

However, in spite of its flaws, there was no doubt among civil society representatives interviewed in all countries on the importance of media as an important actor for raising awareness on civil society initiatives and for influencing policy for bringing social change. Some organizations also view media coverage as crucial for their work. This is especially the case for think tanks, organizations that monitor government policy and conduct, as well as advocacy groups that aim to influence particular policies.

Another problem emerging from the interviews related to the relationship of civil society organizations with the media was the scarce knowledge and interest of journalists on the work of NGOs and the lack of continuous commitment in this aspect. In addition, reports and data provided by NGOs are only covered superficially, or, worse, they are covered in a selective way and interpreted differently in different media, adapted to suit their own editorial policy. While these flaws are mainly recognized as systemic problems, related to work overload of journalists, specific positive examples were brought where civil society actors had succeeded in attracting interest of journalists on their work, resulting in long-term cooperation. In line with these experiences, in many countries the civil society organizations have also started to employ persons that are responsible for relations with the media, aiming to establish a regular presence and media coverage.

Failure of journalists to respect professional norms in some cases and the continuous shift in values of newsworthiness were two other factors that led many civil society organizations to consider media as an enemy, rather than a friend or partner in their work. The pervasive trend of media toward sensationalism and its tabloidization have led to a situation where it is increasingly more attractive to favor stories that are sensational and often breach human rights, rather than devote attention to stories on civil society organizations that work on public interest. In several countries, the problem of media expecting financial gains in order to cover civil society also highlighted the not always smooth relation between these two actors. Finally, the inability of civil society organizations to package their story and activity in a form adapted to the media requirements was also a recognized flaw among civil society representatives in the region. More positively, the options provided for social activism by internet and social media, along with specific cases of closer cooperation between civil society and media actors to the benefit of public interest were also visible trends in several countries.

Civil society and media: do they ever meet?!

Each country in the region has a potential space and way for civil society and media to meet: the council of the regulator of electronic or audiovisual media, the council of public broadcaster, advisory bodies to these institutions, or even self-regulation media councils. The legislation of every country stipulates this in the cases of regulator and public broadcaster, requiring that the representation of such institutions is also enriched by civil society representatives. They are usually nominated by civil society organizations, academia, or similar groups, and then elected by parliament.

While on paper these solutions might seem satisfactory, in practice their implementation has turned out to be problematic in all the countries of Western Balkans. The first and main problem lies with the formula and procedure itself: while many organizations might be entitled to nominate candidates, in the end the election is a political process, involving political parties in the parliament, who make the final decision. This procedure does not guarantee that the most professional or independent candidate will be elected, but rather that the person viewed most favorably by one party or another will have greater chances.

In addition, following the law to the letter does not seem to be a common practice in the appointment of members of regulatory bodies or public broadcasting councils. There have been cases in almost all countries where the rules of the game were changed right in the middle of it, to favor pro-government candidates or to stop others from being elected. This has been the case in Montenegro and especially in Serbia, where government efforts to prevent proposal of official candidates to reach the Assembly led to an open letter of protest from fifty five Serbian organizations, accusing the government of violations of the media law.

Even when civil society actors are elected in these bodies, there is no guarantee on their acting in the name of the public interest rather than the political wing that enabled their appointment. For example, in Albania, even though the members of such bodies are proposed by political parties, there is a clear division in major voting processes within the council, reflecting the position of one party or the other. Such a situation was noticed in spring of 2016, when after months of voting, the parliament decided to change the formula for electing the general director of RTSH, claiming that it was necessary given the deadlock that the council itself could not solve due to division of its members.

In other cases, where civil society members have attempted to influence the work of institutions, they have encountered the resistance of deeply

entrenched politicization of institutions or efforts to their re-politicization. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the efforts of the Program Council of RTRS to influence the program and contribute to better representations of different interests of citizens did not last long and were soon reduced to a mere formality. Similarly, cases in other countries indicate that even when there are the best intentions of civil society members, they often find themselves powerless when faced with the politicized ways the public broadcaster and the regulator work in most countries.

On the brighter side, countries such as Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are two countries where the press council functions relatively well and the involvement of civil society in these bodies, as well as the cooperation between media and civil society is certainly a positive factor that contributes to the self-regulation practice of the media in these countries.

The bridge: Media NGOs

In each country there are a various organizations of civil society that focus on freedom of expression and media development, aiming to act as a meeting point between civil society and media. The research identified three main types of organizations. First, there are organizations focused on providing training and other career opportunities for journalists, as well as on monitoring and furthering freedom of media through media policy, media debates, and other initiatives. In most countries these are organizations that have existed for almost two decades and have been key actors in particular fields of media development.

Second, there are the so-called hybrid organizations: registered NGOs engaged mainly in journalism content production, but also offering training or other opportunities for journalists. Against the background of increasing politicization of the media scene, these organizations aim to fill the void in investigative journalism and have become an increasingly popular and recognized source for other media and for the public. Since they are mostly funded by foreign donors, they enjoy a great deal of editorial independence, but questions on their sustainability remain.

The third and last type of organizations identified is the organizations and associations of journalists themselves, which tend to be also among the weakest. This weakness was recognized in all reports, due to lack of capacities or interest of journalists to organize among themselves, but also because of the deep political divisions that exist in the media scene.

Media, civil society, and public participation

The research reports produced mixed views on the extent of success of the media and civil society to encourage public participation and to influence government policy. In most countries a well-established practice of institutional dialogue between government and civil society is lacking, or is carried out in a perfunctory way. However, there are also good practices of civil society organizations, which are active both in cooperating with the media and in monitoring the government and influencing its policies. For example, the think-tanks in Kosovo have had a very good record on this and their profile is being strengthened, although when direct interest of political parties is involved the intervention of civil society is marginalized. In Macedonia there have also been several attempts of organizations or coalitions of organizations to propose reforms to the media law and facilitate several public debates. The same can be said on media laws in Albania and in Kosovo. Overall, when it comes to passing or amending legislation there is a rather successful record of civil society.

However, the lack of transparency of civil society organizations in some cases or the dubious nature of their affiliation have also led to concerns of a hidden colonization of the civil society field from political parties, where seemingly independent civil society organizations supporting different parties are pitted against one another. A similar trend is also visible in Serbia, where the recent years' dynamics have established a division of the society in two camps: independent media and civil society organizations on one hand, and government and its own media and civil society, on the other hand, reducing the chances for political participation of the wider public and leading to even greater political division among society.

A trend that all reports confirmed was the rising importance of social media as an alternative way and tool of organizing public participation or even public protests, especially in the face of increasingly authoritarian regimes and corrupt media. Both independent media organizations and the civil society actors, or even individuals, are continuously employing social media platforms in an effort to have a wider reach and mobilize more people for their causes, be it a simple petition or month-long efforts of protests of students.

ALBANIA

Partners, rather than friends or foes

Valbona Sulce

A brief description of the media landscape

Accusation to the 2016 Freedom House Report, Albania is a country with partly free media, scoring 49 points out of 100. "The media are vigorous and fairly diverse. However, outlets often display a strong political bias, and their reporting is influenced by the economic or political interests of their owners", the report says in its summary. The same position is confirmed by the 2016 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders, ranking Albania 82nd out of 180 countries.

Since the fall of communism in 1990, Albania has struggled to have an independent, free and fair media scene. The constitution guarantees freedom of the press. Defamation remains a criminal offense, though legal reforms enacted in 2012 eliminated prison terms as a punishment, leaving only fines. A 2012 amendment to the civil code set limits on financial penalties for defamation in order to protect the survival of media outlets.

In terms of plurality, Albanian media represents an interesting case study. There is a variety of daily and weekly newspapers (around 20), but circulation is the lowest in Europe and distribution networks do not reach some rural areas. Albanians have access to satellite television, foreign radio content, and television broadcasts from neighboring Greece and Italy. There are no government restrictions on the internet, which is accessed by more than 60 percent of the population, but access in rural areas remains limited.

Television remains the primary source of political information. Two private television stations have national reach, and dozens of smaller television and radio outlets (over 70) also operate in a poorly regulated environment. The Public Broadcaster RTSH is constantly under criticism for a pro-government editorial line and the poor quality of its programs. The advertising market is very small. There are no real data on audience measurement.

While the implementation of the strategy for switching from analogue to digital broadcasting resumed in 2015 - after the conclusion of a court case brought against the regulator by some broadcasters - the internationally agreed deadline for June was not met. The public service broadcaster (RTSH) is currently building its two digital networks needed to host its programs and those of local operators, while two private digital platforms operate in the country since 2004.

Media ownership is reportedly obscured by the use of proxies, which circumvents legal barriers to concentration. There is little foreign investment in the Albanian media market. A private TV channel was closed down in 2015 after its Italian owner Francesco Becchetti was sued by the Albanian Prosecutor's Office on charges of fiscal evasion and money laundering. Most outlets rely on financial support from owners and a few major advertisers. The economic crisis in Albania since 2011 has affected many funding sources, and outlets often delay salaries. According to the Albanian Union of Journalists, most journalists work without being declared to social security and other public schemes, and only four out of 23 daily newspapers and 10 out of 72 TV stations disburse salaries on time.

An OSCE/ODHIR report on the 2015 local elections notes that "despite the large number of media outlets, their affiliation with the main political parties, resulting from media owners' business interests, causes direct interference in editorial autonomy, self-censorship, and limits pluralism of viewpoints. In addition, the media's dependence on revenues from public tenders and state advertising undermines the media's responsibility to scrutinize those in power."

Investigative journalism still remains an exception with very few outlets focusing on pervasive corruption such as Reporter.al/BIRN. Online media is represented mainly by the webpages of mainstream media and few news portals opened up recently.

In spite of numerous problems with the media scene, its power and trust among the population is not negligible. Public perception surveys constantly rank media as among the most trustworthy institutions, after the international community. A 2014 survey confirmed that the media continue to rank low on the distrust scale when compared to other institutions and organizations.

A brief description of civil society sector

The first Civil Society Index study carried out in 2010 revealed that the Albanian third sector is moderately developed. "Civil society is widely

perceived as, and identified only with nonprofit organizations. It operates in a generally enabling environment and at a relatively developed organizational level that appears supportive to the general practice of values within the sector. Its major deficiencies consist of the low degree of civic engagement and also the limited impact," the CSI says.

According to the Tirana Court of First Instance, which registers CSOs and maintains the CSO register, there were 6,855 CSOs in Albania at the end of 2014. However, this number could change significantly as the court continues to update its new electronic register.

Civil society organizations operate in many sectors from human rights, minority rights, women's rights and empowerment, children rights to environment, culture preservation, etc. There also numerous think tanks, research centers and foundations, which provide well-grounded in in-depth research about many aspects of Albanian life. CSOs have a good reputation for high expertise and human capacities. The sector of the services provided by NGOs remains small and dependent on foreign funds.

According to USAID, the CSO Sustainability Index in Albania improved in 2014, with advances in organizational capacity, advocacy, and infrastructure. "CSOs have increased their internal organizational capacities, constituency building mechanisms, and advocacy efforts, and the government increasingly recognizes the contribution of CSOs in major national reforms and policy-making processes. The legal environment, financial viability, service provision, and public image, on the other hand, have stagnated." Based on the 2014 Trust in Government study conducted by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation, 34 percent of the population trusts CSOs, a 5 percent decline since 2013. Low levels of civic participation are seen as a consequence of policy / decision makers under-estimating the values of civic actions and initiatives. The painful transition period has led to individualistic attitudes and apathy towards volunteering.

A report to the OSCE Permanent Council by the head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, says that "however, the civil sector remained largely weak and politicized."[1] In fact, civil society organizations and their effectiveness do not enjoy a high degree of trust among the Albanian public, while civil society itself seems to be often politically divided. Albanian NGOs are also invariably dependent on foreign funding, often lacking sufficient financial and human resources.

On a more recent note, the 2016 Nations in Transit report concludes that "Albania has made good progress in establishing an institutional framework

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[1] http://shqiptarja.com/pdf/new/OSBE.pdf

for civil society cooperation and cooperation between state institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) has improved."

Financial viability is considered the most pressing concern for NGOs in Albania, which depend mostly on foreign donor grants for funding. Since 2009, state aid is also available for NGOs through an agency set up for this purpose. This agency has been criticized by civil society for the allocation of funding; civil society actors are claiming that loyalty to the government is the main criterion for awarding funds.

Civic activism, however, has made some progress with students movement against reform in higher education, the "Qytetaret per Parkun," (Citizens for the Park) group etc., while social networks have been instrumental in raising their profile.

Coverage of civil society in the media. An analysis

The coverage of civil society in the Albanian media has the same problems as the coverage of marginalized groups, women, children, etc., which are considered superficial and are not followed up. This kind of coverage is related to the norms that Albanian media apply in the process of newsgathering, analyzing, contextualizing, etc. It depends also on the professionalism of the journalists and on the personal values and beliefs of the editors toward civil society.

Alba Malltezi, General Director of the Free and Fair Media Group, which owns Shqiptarja.com newspaper and Report TV, is of the opinion that besides a few positive cases such as Mjaft, LGBT, Ecovolis, there are no others representing civil society. "Or they act when they have funds. When the funds are over, they disappear. Or worse, they have funds, but they don't act." She says that since many years now, they have abandoned conferences and seminars of the so-called civil society, "because they have often resulted in false meetings, without any contribution or interest, just a way to spend money in luxurious hotels in Tirana. This applies also for organizations that help the media." "In our newsrooms come homosexuals, violated women, people in need which know only the state and the media to ask for help, so they don't know to knock on the doors of or go to these NGOs (with few exceptions). I don't recall a single case when civil society has approached us with a clear proposal for help in media for someone or a category," she adds. However, Malltezi believes that although civil society in Albania is still a particle, when it is true, it has the value of a diamond.

Mentor Kikia, a senior journalist and editor at Top Channel TV, says that they have no specific policy for covering civil society. "All notifications for

activities are reviewed; we ask for preliminary information about the data which are going to be published and then we decide to cover it or not. They gain news value when they have arguments, or the issues they raise are new." Kikia says that the NGO community is the part which less represents civil society. "NGOs have been transformed into businesses, small and medium enterprises. Politics has been successful in buying or subordinating, making Albania a unique country where alternative voices are not heard."

In our monitoring, we took three newspapers: Panorama, Gazeta Shqiptare and Mapo during March 1-21, 2016. 25 articles were found covering civil society activity. The themes varied, with the central theme being the protest of the "Qytetarët për Parkun" group regarding the construction of a playground in Tirana, the capital. 9 articles were found about the theme of describing the dynamics of the protests.

The other themes include: protests of the Association of Merchants for the new municipal taxes, protest of the taxi drivers for the same reasons, the Forum for the Protection of National Heritage of Monuments, a meeting about women's rights at the municipality of Tirana and one conference with participation of the Minister of Defense, a project of an NGO regarding the communist regime in Shkodra – a guide, reportage about Greek-Albanian cultural days, the reaction of the Head of the Blind People's Association over a decision of Tirana District Court, etc.

In general, the reporting is neutral, describing the activities correctly. In most cases, articles quote the representatives of civil society, but in one case the activity organized by the Association of Women with Social Problems, mentions only the Minister of Defense and the Swedish ambassador's statements.[2] This way, the conferences serve as platforms for VIPs to make public their positions rather than the CS participants to express their views on the issue. Also there is no follow up on the events, only in case of street protests, or context about the profile of the organizations, or in-depth coverage based on data from CSOs, etc.

In the case of the protests for the Park in Tirana, the coverage reflected the editorial lines of the media involved. So, Panorama echoed more the side of the Municipality giving space to labeling used by the Mayor toward protesters such as "losers and delirants seeking attention in TV[3]" or "The owner of Kassel: how protesters broke my leg[4]" designing a violent profile of activists in the headlines, while at GSH more space is given to activists. Apart from a notification about the protest[5], there is also a statement of the activist Elian Tanini saying protests will not stop[6]. Another article[7] on the failed meeting between the group and the municipality gives also voice to the activists publishing their six requests. "Mapo", which claims an analytical profile rather than a 'news' one, is more balanced giving the two sides of the protest in the same title:"Clashes over the Park, one policeman and one protester hurt".[8]

Regarding online media, we made a research with keywords such as "lgbt" and "civil society" and the results were as follows:

In general, there is no hate speech towards LGBT in Albanian media. On the contrary, Albanian media has been one of the promoters of respecting the LGBT community, reporting fairly on their issues[9]. Not the same may

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[2] Fuqizimi i rolit te grave ne shoqeri, Kodheli: Duhet vullnet politik (Strengthening women's role in the society, Kodheli: political will is needed), GSH

[3] Veliaj: Dhuna i diskreditoi, qyteti jo peng i deliranteve (Veliaj: The violence discredited them; the city – not hostage of delirants,)Panorama, 7.03.2016

[4] Pronari i Kassel: Si ma thyen kemben protestuesit, (Onwer of Kasse: How protesters broke my leg), Panorama, 19.03.2016

[5] Ndertimet te Parku i Liqenit, qytetaret neser ne 12 ne proteste, (Construction at the Lake Park, citizens to protest tomorrow at 12), GSH, 7.03.2016

[6] Ndertimet te Parku i Liqenit, Tanini: Protestat nuk ndale, (Constructions at Lake Park, Tanini: Protests won't stop), GSH, 8.03.2016

[7] Deshton takimi i bashkise per diskutimin e projektit, ja 6 kerkesat e shoqerise civile, (Municipality meeting with to discuss project fails; 6 civil society requests), GSH 11.03.2016

[8] Perplasja per Parkun, lendohen nje protestues dhe nje polic, (Clashes over park, one protester and one police officer injured), Mapo, 06.03.2016

[9] Policia e Shkodrës dhunë psikologjike ndaj tranvestitit Anxhela: Çfarë je, burrë apo grua? LGBT i ankohet Tahirit (Shkodra Police uses psychological violence toward transvestite Anxhela: What are you, a man or a woman? LGBT complains to Tahiri)
FOTO/ Crazy Party. LGBT jo vetëm paragjykime, por edhe festa në lokalet e Tiranës (LGBT – not only prejudice, but also parties in Tirana bars)

be said about in online media, which are full of hate speech toward the LGBT especially, and on the other hand receive no reply from the editors, contributing to a hostile environment despite the efforts of the media.

For the keyword "civil society" we had these results:

In general, all protests are covered by news media, being that about women's rights, the Park, the protests of students, etc. The protest of civil society for the playground of Tirana was also extensively covered by online media through the websites of mainstream media or portals and news agencies. The protests of Tirana citizens supporting children after a video scandal was published in the orphanage of Shkodra also had great coverage from the media. Balkanweb[10] writes about the protest organized in social networks by activist Edlira Cepani, but also BIRN.

On a more critical tone, Lapsi.al says that former members of the Mjaft organization share funds dedicated for civil society[11]. Another article gives space to the protests organized by a new group called "protesters" with

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[10] Abuzimi me fëmijët jetimë, qytetarë dhe shoqëria civile protestë me mesazhe solidarizimi (Abuse with orphan children, citizens and civil society protest with solidarity messages)

[11] Si i ndajnë ish -mjaftistat fondet e qeverisë për shoqërinë civile (How the ex-Mjaft members share government funds for civil society)

masks on their faces[12]. "Forumi i trashegimise" (Heritage Forum) is put under scrutiny, calling them "mercenary" for their apathy regarding the urban plan of Tirana.[13]

An example that reflects the concept of the media toward civil society is the issue of the new stadium. In the presentation event of the project, some prominent media analysts were not allowed to enter the room and the title was: "Hearing for the stadium, civil society not allowed"[14]

What civil society think about media

Civil society sees media as a partner, rather than a friend or foe. Usually, CSOs have former journalists covering media relations for their activities, who know very well how media works. Elda Spaho for example has been for many years a journalist in the print media and now she works as a communication officer for one of the biggest organizations for children and youth, World Vision. Spaho believes that media in principle, is similar to her organization: media raises issues about several categories, gives voice, raises awareness, highlights problems. "This is a strong basis for having media not simply as a friend, but a partner in our struggle against injustice. This is the reason why we push on the professional friendship with journalists, which has been proven very successful. In the last four years we have had 1000 media clips on World Vision, which for me are not simply publicity for the organization, but reports about children and youth issues in Albania".

The same view is shared by Aranita Brahaj, Executive Director of the Albanian Institute of Science, also a former journalist. "Media has been our partner in the concretization of many activities and dissemination of results (analysis, data, articles, etc). In general, our coordination with media representatives has been friendly and productive." Besjan Pesha from "Nisma Thurje", an activist group established in 2013, also says that media is a partner. "This relationship has its ups and downs due to the political agenda of the media owners or economic interests, but in general the relationship is friendly."

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[12] Të lidhur me zinxhirë para parlamentit (foto) (tied with chains before the parliament; photo)

[13] Pse hesht Forumi i Trashëgimisë? Intelektualë apo mercenarë? (Why does the Heritage Forum hush? Intellectuals or Mercenaries?)

[14] Dëgjesë për Stadiumin, s'lejohet Shoqëria Civile. Lubonja: Berisha ka të drejtë për armatosjen! Rama: Teatër, normale që s'u lejuat (Hearing on the stadium; civil society not allowed. Lubonja – Berisha is right about getting armed! Rama: Theater – normal you weren't allowed in)

Mirela Arqimandriti, who leads the Gender Alliance for Development Center, has a different view. Arqimandriti notes that the politicization of the media in Albania contributes to less attention on civil society activities at the expense of the citizens' information. "Although media is present in activities of CSOs, it mostly does so when political figures or high level officials attend activities, which are usually hijacked by them and the main message of the activity usually gets lost or is not properly transmitted. In Albania's context where the media serves political parties more than citizens it leans more towards a foe than a friend."

Edlira Cepani from the Equality on Decision making network, but also an activist for social causes from children to animal rights, acknowledges that the relationship with the media depends on the causes you follow. "If that cause is against the political/editorial lines of the media, they have no echo. Fortunately, positive cases where media is an ally of civil society are in greater numbers."

The over-politicization of the media agenda is also concerning for Ervin Goci, an activist of the "Qytetaret per Parkun" movement. "What has been constant for all media is that after protests in the field have been concluded, they have not come anymore where part of the activists gathered, but only when the Youth Forum of the Democratic Party became active. The attention in this case went to the young democrats and less on us, while we have been trying to have our statements regarding the presence of the DP and the abusive works being carried out".

Goci, who is also a media researcher, sees huge problems in "the information system" as he calls the news media, in three axes: no investigative reporting, no context of the reported news and no follow up. This damages the quality of reporting for citizens because this information system is based "on sensationalism, empty statements filling information spaces" and not on the professional filters to give information to the public, not just the news.

Altin Hazizaj from the Center for Children's Rights in Albania, also coming from a journalism experience, is convinced that media is a friend, but it can be turned into a foe for sensitive issues. "At times media can be a foe, especially when the issue is a sensitive one, such as abortion, women's rights, LGBT rights, religion etc. Yet, if one works with media and has the skills needed, it could achieve a great degree of getting the message from those groups to the society at large."

One thing is sure: civil society organizations strive for media attention. They have understood also that if you treat media as an ally, the benefits are greater. Spaho is convinced that if you tell media that you are there as an NGO that has something important to tell, they are more open to cooperate with

you. But in the minute you use media only as a PR tool, the decline starts. "This is bad because the media will not only ignore you, but it will also ignore the cause it believes in."

Depending on the nature of their work, the relationship with media is crucial for some organizations. For example the Open Data project of AIS would be impossible to reach the audience without the cooperation of the mainstream media. Brahaj says that in this case, media is a beneficiary of their product. "At the same time, without re-use or re-dissemination in the media, it would be impossible to communicate with other interest groups, or to have visibility and impact. It's impossible to start a public debate without the assistance of the media. Media is a user of our product, an instrument for distribution and communication. "

Arqimandriti also sees media as "a visibility tool for our initiatives". Hazizaj says it's both. "Media is a great PR tool and one cannot ignore that fact; lots of NGO's use the media typically because of this purpose. The image of the organizations and the perception of public opinion on an NGO or all of them could influence our work positively or negatively. As such, a PR element in the NGO work is very important. Nonetheless, as most of us work with disadvantaged groups, for us the media needs to be an ally. For that reason, the relationship between the NGO and the media outlet needs to be a well-established one, which has a history of cooperation and that of course it is built on trust and respect."

Pesha takes into consideration that with internet-based media and social media platforms, activism has changed. "Social networks have re-dimensioned this relationship. Today everyone has their own media through which they can distribute the message or influence the public if they have the right PR skills. In this context, media often follow you because it is in crisis of fresh news or because of the inflation with the news".

One of the strong points of civil society in Albania is that it has great expertise and provides a number of reports, studies and surveys every year. CSO's are satisfied with the cooperation with media, because they use them, but they would like more analyses on the part of journalists. Another concern is that usually, media neither mentions nor gives credit to the CSOs conducting the activities nor provides any analysis.

However Spaho says that Albanian journalists are open and thirsty for information. "Give them ideas and stories, and they will come to you."

When civil society and media meet

Although the regulatory bodies are meant to represent the public in their functions, this is rarely happening. The cause seems to be a long

tradition of not having public institutions but rather state ones and the polarized environment of the Parliament which is responsible for electing the members of these bodies.

Starting with Public Radio-Television, Albania has no experience of a real public broadcaster as there is in European countries. Established in 1961 as a propaganda tool of the communist regime, RTSH has failed to turn into a public institution, despite many efforts by foreign and national actors.

The Steering Councils, which constitute the highest decision-making body in the hierarchical organization, have had a weak role with the only responsibility being to formally elect the general director, which was and is the principal authority of the RTSH. A new law approved in 2013 was expected to bring some independence and clearer division of powers between the Steering Council and Management. But the process of electing members of the Steering Council is still depending on politics.

Although the law foresees the candidates from civil society to apply for their membership to the SC, parties are the ones that decide on the composition of the Council according to the formula: 5 from the majority, 5 from the opposition and the Chairman directly from the majority. This leads to the already spread misperception that the members are representatives of the political parties. On the other hand, political parties do not make any effort to contradict this perception because even for them, members are "theirs".

The most illustrative case is the election of the General Director of RTSH , which took more than a year to be finalized. In terms of process, an open competition was organized. 60 candidates took part and the finalists were invited to a public hearing for their vision and platforms. During the first phase, 3 candidates shared respectively 5, 5 and 1 vote. The first two continued the race and the result was 6 to 5 for one candidate once and 6 to 5 for the other in the third phase. In these circumstances, the Council could not decide the winner, because the law required a qualified majority of 7 votes. For the public, this was proof of the political division of the SC, while the SC tried to unblock the situation with another open call, which failed. The law was amended and, ironically, the General Director was elected with 7 votes.

As a first-hand testimonial, we can say that the members of the Steering Council do feel obliged to political parties for their election, but only when it comes to electing the General Director. For all other decisions, they try to behave in compliance with their professional and personal values, also representing the groups they come from. In order to contribute to the independence of the SC, a proposal to amend the law has been prepared as well, including the competences of the SC, the approval of the Statute, etc.

A similar situation is seen with the broadcast media regulator AMA. The opposition has objected to the election of the new Chairman, saying he was not eligible for the post, being one of the lawyers of the biggest private media company in the country, Top Channel. However, AMA was constituted with the votes of the majority and the "hot potato" on the plate is the licensing of the digital platforms. Presently, the process is blocked because two members, chosen by the opposition, have voted against the beauty contest procedure. Their mandate is over now and the Parliament is administering the election process of new members.

On the positive side, AMA has pushed towards the digitization process especially of the public broadcaster, organizing a public information campaign on digitalization, explaining the benefits of this process after a massive study was conducted in cooperation with the University of Tirana. The Complaints Commission was established and promised to put order into the chaotic media scene. Some initial actions such as fines or notifications for ethics violations are promising in this aspect.

The bridge: Media NGO-s

Over years, journalists and media workers have been trying to organize in associations, but they have faded over time. Another characteristic of media NGOs have been their grouping according to media companies or the reporting beat. For some time, the associations of journalists covering health or economy, or recently the justice sector, have been active, but once the funds have finished, they have stopped functioning.

The Union of Journalists is the biggest and most active media organization in the country with 850 members. It has regional branches and it is constantly monitoring and denouncing poor labor conditions for journalists, lack of collective agreements, delay of salary payments for journalists, etc. The Union has more of a profile of a trade union asking for the rights of journalists in the market, although it is trying also to build capacities of its members through trainings, facilitating exchanges with other countries, etc. The Union gives an annual award for economic journalism "Vangjush Gambeta" funded by JTI.

The Albanian Media Institute (AMI) is a central resource and training center for media, with considerable contribution to a number of reforms in favor of media freedom. Hundreds of journalists have been trained by the Institute , which is also a partner for many regional and European initiatives. AMI is a point of reference for almost all journalists and editors for exchanging experience, study tours and publications. Research is also a strong point of the AMI, including Albania in the map of regional studies

in fields such as media integrity, media ownership, freedom of expression, digital media, online media, etc. The open nature of AMI has secured it an important place in every discussion table about media in Albania.

BIRN Albania is a new media non-governmental organization based in Tirana, which specializes in investigative reporting, publishing and media monitoring. Launched in March 2014, BIRN Albania provides skills and knowledge-based training to individual journalists and media organizations via vocational and workshop-based methods; publishes high quality reports, investigations and analyses on crucial transitional political, economic and social themes. The expertise of the BIRN Albania editorial staff in investigative reporting has been recognized locally, regionally and internationally.

Media Active Center is another recently established NGO, which is focused on trainings and education programs for citizens, especially young ones, on radio, television and digital media. The same group has established last year the Media Council which aims to promote the Code of Ethics among media operators in the country, serving as representatives of public interest.

Last, but not least the Center for the Development and Democratization of the Institutions, established in 2002 has been very active in creating a favorable terrain for journalists to apply the right of information as a basic and human right. It has been very active in pushing for amendments to the Law on the Right to Information in order to make it applicable for citizens.

Media, civil society, and public participation

The 2015 EU progress report notes that Albania has made progress in institutionalizing dialogue between civil society and the decision-making level. The Agency for the Support of Civil Society has now new members, selected with an open procedure with online voting. Civil Society has a seat at important institutions such as the National Council for Children Rights or the National Council for European Integration.

Over years, civil society has established a good practice of hearings in the Parliament when laws with a focus on different segments of society are discussed. There are also some good practices of participatory budgeting at the local level, but this is not so widespread. For the national budget, especially for education and health, there has been a practice to have suggestions from civil society, an experience that has diminished in recent years. On the positive side, civil society has been successful in pushing amendments of the law on domestic violence for example and raising awareness about more women in politics, etc.

Social media platforms have resulted very effective in mobilizing citizens around causes. The most prominent case has been the protest against the chemical weapons in Albania which gathered around one million people online and thousands in the streets, obliging the government of Albania to be transparent over its decision and at the end, to refuse them.

The "Qytetaret per Parkun" group, which has established a TV channel online, has been very active in social networks, namely Facebook. EcoVolis (118 k), another NGO is also very active on social networks, mobilizing citizens in their initiatives such as Mass Kids, protests for having proper infrastructure for cyclists, recycling, building the first Roma camp in Tirana, etc.

Also individuals/ activists are making great use of social platforms to organize protests or petitions. The last example was the protest for children's protection in Tirana, which was considered a success given the number of participants. Volunteer protests were organized also in other cities such as in Elbasan or Shkodra.

Media on the other hand has been active in promoting its charity causes such as the case of Kristi Maze, a fundraising initiative of News 24 TV which was able to mobilize around 165 000 Euros for the child's surgery in Italy. To a smaller scale, individual journalists, especially those dealing with social issues, have been able to mobilize help for poor families or children in need through their personal accounts in social networks.

Conclusions

Media and civil society are both very important to democracy and they have done their best on their own to advance the democratic agenda and mobilize citizens. While media has a level of trust among citizens, CS has to work harder to gain more public support.

Media and civil society do view each other as partners, but they have a long way to go to make this partnership concrete and useful.

Media owners' agenda hamper their outlet's pursuit of public interest, while CSOs are also viewed as politically oriented. Their dependence on foreign money is considered a barrier for their activism in Albania.

The image of civil society for journalists has to be improved, while civil society should invest more time and energy on media relationships, explaining patiently the value of their work and the importance of working together.

Media and civil society have a long history of ups and downs, but they still lack trust in each other. Data are appealing, but more so for the print

media. For the broadcast media, they need human faces and voices. On the other hand, NGO's working on human rights are not satisfied with the ethics of media regarding their "clients". Personal data are a permanent concern for CSOs with regard to media. On the other hand, media say CSOs are not open to the media, using privacy as a façade to hide real problems. A recent project of UN Women financed by the EU sought to strengthen relationships between media and NGOs working for victims of trafficking, explaining the nature of the trafficking and encouraging in-depth reports. Earlier, another effort from UN Women sought to increase cooperation of the media with CSOs working on women's rights with a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the Union of Journalists, which ultimately was not efficient. In parallel with this, NGOs are investing in journalists 'professionalism, organizing trainings and producing manuals for improving reporting skills on minorities, women, children, etc.

Media see civil society efforts as instrumental while civil society thinks media has little attention on their activities because it is over-politicized. CSOs complain that although media use their data, they often do not quote the source.

Coverage of civil society in the media is, in general, neutral and correct, but more should be done in terms of professionalism, leaving aside VIPs or politicians which join the cause for their own publicity. In general, Albanian media has developed an "allergy" toward seminars and conferences, which has been for many years the main characteristic of civil society activity in the country, contributing to the image of civil society as a "bunch of people spending money in Tirana's luxurious hotels." On the other hand, studies and surveys presented in these seminars have been used by Albanian media to raise awareness on specific issues. Also they can be used as context in ensuing reports. Civil society needs to explore innovative ways to work with media and make its activities interesting and newsworthy.

Social platforms are proving to be a very effective tool in raising citizen awareness and reaching larger audiences. The encouraging examples of Nisma Thurje, Ecovolis, Qytetaret per Parkun, to name only a few, are a clear signal that civil society in Albania is alive and growing.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Neither allies, nor adversaries

Sanela Hodzic

This research report is based on a study conducted by Mediacentar Sarajevo, as part of regional study lead by the Albanian Media Institute. It explores the patterns of mutual relations between media and civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, within a methodological framework involving secondary research, small-scale survey (eleven respondents), interviews (three in-depth and two short interviews), as well as analysis of media content (analysis of 14 days of media reporting of three major print and three major online media outlets)[1]. The content analysis provided insights into the frequency and patterns of media reporting on civil society, while the survey and interviews were aimed at exploring the perception of individuals from the sectors, media and civil society, about each other and their mutual relations. Before the results of primary research are presented, the report will first provide a short introduction about the media and civil society in the country.

Short overview of the media sector

The global indicators of media freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina had shown a steady growth for years in the post-war country. The solid legislative, regulatory and institutional framework that was developed sought to assure media freedom and respect for professional norms. Among other things, media content was for the most part pacified; decriminalization of

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[1] The analyzed dates were selected based on a stratified random sampling over a period of two months, given that we attempted to capture the patterns of regular reporting. In this period, also few dates which hold particular relevance for the civil society are selected – i.e. 16 and 17 May, days of the fight against homophobia. The selected days are: 28 and 29 April, 7 and 8 May, 16 and 17 May, 25 and 26 May, 3 and 4 June, 12 and 13 June, and 21 and 22 June. Media included in the sample are dailies Oslobođenje, Nezavisne novine and Dnevni avaz, and online media klix.ba, bljesak-info and banjaluka.com. They were selected based on relevance and reach, but also with the attempt to include media from both entities, based in three major cities- Banjaluka, Mostar and Sarajevo.

libel assured freedom of journalists from imprisonment; the Freedom of Information Act was adopted on state and entity levels; the public service system was established; there was a proliferation of broadcasters promising media pluralism and transition of the previously state owned print media into private ownership is becoming the thing of the past. However, the weak implementation mechanisms and lack of advanced policy developments have become increasingly evident, in particular with the financial crisis in the background. In the past several years, the positive trends were much reversed, as indicated in the declining position of BiH on global systems of monitoring media freedoms[2].

The market is populated by nine dailies, more than 180 different magazines, 144 radio stations, 43 television stations[3] and a large number of online media, but this abundance is not coupled with high media pluralism or media quality. In fact, the majority of media are receiving merely enough funding to survive, but hardly enough to be promoting journalistic quality. Moreover, the fact that the financially weak media market, ravished by the economic crisis and additionally affected with the migration of advertisers towards foreign and non-journalistic media, is maintaining almost the same number of media outlets over the years raises doubts about possibly conflicting sources of revenues.

Against the background of scarce sources of revenues, the role of government funding has become decisive. While it contributed to the sustainability of the sector, their public interest is doubted and such funding is believed to be curbing editorial policies towards the interests of the ruling parties. Firstly, given that the privatization process was never finalized, local authorities are still the founders and direct financiers of 28 percent of TV stations (out of 43 overall) and 44 percent of radio stations (out of 139 overall). Without assured long-term funding and with the politicized appointments of the management of these broadcasters, they can hardly have a strong public interest role, and instead are mostly perceived as mouthpieces of municipal and cantonal government(s). Similarly, government advertising or public campaigning contracts, and government donations, have often been questioned for the lack of public interest-criteria and lack

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[2] Global reports point to the decline in freedom of expression and media professionalism. Ranking of the press freedom index by Reporters sans Frontiers has been mostly declining since 2007, and in 2016 BiH ranged 68th out of 180 countries. A similar decline was registered by Freedom House, with the press in BiH being evaluated as partly free. MSI IREX scores for 2016 especially point to the downfall in terms of business performance and environment (MSI IREX reports available at: https://www.irex.org). For more on the risks to media integrity and freedom in BiH, see Media observatory publications, at: www.mediaobservatory.net.

[3] Sources: websites of Press Council of B&H and Communications Regulatory Agency.

of transparency. Media that turn to the advertising market for revenues are hardly free from interference, given that main advertisers are controlled by key political parties, while abuses of advertising contracts for personal financial gains are also considered a common practice[4]. Appointments of the managing structures within the public service broadcasters are highly politicized, which negatively affects their public service role[5]. Public media, including the local broadcasters and the PSB are obliged to dedicate a part of the informative program to minorities and vulnerable groups,[6] but without systematic monitoring of the broadcaster's content, it remains unclear to what extent and in which manner this obligation is met and whether it regularly includes reporting on civil society.

On the level of media policies, there are no substantial efforts to promote media freedom and pluralism or to promote reporting on the civil sector. For the most part, media are perceived to be a function of particular political and business interests, while the public interest role, including reporting on civil society, is rarely among editorial priorities.

Short overview of the civil society sector

There are no recent data about the number of civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the common estimates suggest around twelve thousands are registered on different administrative levels in BiH. Only about half of that number is considered active[7].

The main sources of revenue for the non-governmental sector by far are the government institutions. In 2012, the public sector provided

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[4] See for example article published here: http://www.zurnal.info/novost/18397/marketinske-prevare-otkrivamo-sumnjive-ugovore-koji-nisu-obuhvaceni-akcijom-gibraltar; For related controversies concerning audience measurements, also see article published here: http://www.media-marketing.com/en/opinion/will-ivan-caleta-reign-supreme-over-the-media-space-in-the-region/e

[5] There are three public service broadcasters, mirroring the administrative arrangement in the country: state level BHRT, and two entity-level broadcasters: RTV of Federation BiH and RTRS. Radio-television of Republika Srpska (RTRS) is particularly mentioned for favorable reporting on the ruling party in Republika Srpska

[6] Article 29, Rule 77/2015 on Audio-Visual Media Services, also see Rule 76/2015 on Radio Media Services, as well as the Law on Public Broadcasting System and laws on each of the three public service broadcasters.

[7] A report from 2005 suggests that then there were around 4629 active non-governmental organizations (Nezavisni biro za humanitarna pitanja (IBHI), 2005, Zapošljavanje, pružanje socijalnih usluga i nevladin (NVO) sektor: status i perspektive za Bosnu i Hercegovinu, available at: http://www.ibhi.ba/Documents/Publikacije/2005/QS3%20NGO%20Sector_bos.pdf; Another source from 2011 suggest 6600 are active (Siebenmann E, and Kolić, A, 2011, Civil Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Seeking the way forward, United Nations Voluneers (UNV) programme

something over 100 million KM (51.1 million Euro) for non-governmental organizations, while around a third of that sum was estimated to been received from international donors. It is important to note that the revenues from both sources of revenues is declining, raising concerns about their further sustainability, especially if one takes into account the fact that with the economic crisis in the background, funds provided to non-governmental organizations have been cut disproportionately more when compared to other public spending[8]. The yearly revenues of the sector in 2005 were estimated to around 5.5 million Euro or 4.5 percent of GDP[9]. They declined significantly in the following years, but are still considered an important part of the country's economy[10].

Among the high number of civil society organizations, the part that is focused on the monitoring of the political structures is the most present in the public, but also different NGOs are recognized for delivering particular services to citizens, such as education in different topic areas, distribution of international funds to particular groups of citizens, etc. The participation of the civil sector in decision-making is still not sufficiently promoted at the institutional level, given that no state strategy on civil society exists and at the state level the policy dialogue between the Council of Ministers and civil society has not been formalized[11].

Political activism is ongoing at different levels and in different forms, but its influence on policies remains marginal. Citizen protests have been a frequent occurrence, and especially in the recent years several protests involved a large numbers of participants. In the summer 2013, thousands of protesters gathered in Sarajevo to demand legislation for the national identification numbering system[12]. In February 2014, mass protests gathered even larger numbers of several thousands of citizens in anti-government protests in several cities, mainly in FBiH, with a series of demands published, including requests for resignations of officials. Lack of responsiveness and

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[8] Source Muhić, A.A., 2013. In Ninković-Papić, R. Civil inclusion Foundtion Sarajevo and Civil Society Promotion Centre. p.5. Available at: https://www.cin.ba/images/pdf/Pismo_glava_Izdvajanja_vladinog_sektora_za_nevladin_sektor_u_Bosni_i_Hercegovini_za_2012._godinu.pdf

[9] Last available data by IBHI, 2005, p.2.

[10] See Numanović, A. 2016. Numanović, Millioni u NVO nezanemariv dio ekonomije BiH. Mediacentar Sarajevo. Available at: http://media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/milioni-u-nvo-nezanemariv-dio-ekonomije-bih but there is no newer data.

[11] European Commission, 2015, Commission Staff Working Document: Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015 Report, p. 9. available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_bosnia_and_herzegovina.pdf

[12] The legal vacuum at the time did not allow for registration of new citizens, which caused many difficulties; it hampered the access of the newborn to health care. The interim solution was adopted swiftly, while the final legislative change was adopted later in 2013.

failure of government(s) to introduce substantial changes highlighted the democratic shortcomings in the country[13]. In the latest general elections held in October 2014, the turnout amounted to 54.5 percent[14], and while abstinence is considered an indicator of lack of citizens' trust toward political parties, the political class and state institutions in general, the elections did not bring major changes in power sharing.

Lack of communication and cooperation within the civil sector, as well as between the civil sector, authorities and the media, is mentioned as a major challenge for civil society.[15] In general, unwarrantably high expectations, poor communication on their functioning, as well as some claims of political affiliation and overt lavishness of civil society actors are believed to affect the level of public trust in non-government organizations.[16]

Frequent but mostly superficial and reactive media reporting on civil society

"Civil society" is a phrase that rarely appears in media content in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even when mentioned, it is mostly referred to at an abstract level, without attempting to define or analyze what civil society is and what it ideally should be. As secondary sources suggest[17], in 2015, civil society had been mentioned 60 times by four major dailies, but in only 28 of those articles the references were direct, and even then mainly as a part of statements of speakers. Indicatively, primarily government officials (in 17 out of 28 cases) mention civil society in statements that suggest the civil sector is one of the major stakeholders in the reform processes. In sum, civil society is not reported about in detail and is not meaningfully discussed.

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[13] Feedom House took it as a reason to reduce the score for political rights by one point. The country is in sum considered partly free. More at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/bosnia-and-herzegovina

[14] Data of Central Election Commission, BiH, available here: https://izbori.ba/Documents/2015/25052015/Izborni_Pokazatelji_2002-2014.pdf

[15] See for example the web page on civil society at the Delegation of EU in BiH, at: http://europa.ba/?page_id=679, Also see Siebenmann E, and Kolić, A, 2011, p 10, as well as report by TACSO, 2014-
Civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, available here: http://www.tacso.org/doc/ipsos_report_ba.pdf, where it is reported that as much as two thirds of CSOs believe that consultations mechanisms with the government exist only pro forma (page 6) .

[16] See for example a series of articles published by Mediacentar Sarajevo, available at: http://media.ba/bs/tags/civilno-drustvo-i-mediji. Accessed 28 June 2016.

[17] Čilić, U. 2016. Šta nam je potrebno za reforme?, article published by Mediacentar Sarajevo, available at http://media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/sta-nam-je-potrebno-za-reforme, Accessed 28 June 2016.

The analysis done for the purposes of this report involved not only mentioning of the phrase "civil society", but also other terms through which the members of civil society are identified, such as "organization", "association", "foundation", "trade union" and in some contexts "workers" "parents" or "citizens". The analysis shows that civil society, or its different segments were mentioned 131 times in the period of 14 days, in six analyzed media outlets. This suggests that civil society, in some of its manifestations, is in fact reported upon on a daily basis. This is particularly the case with the most popular online news websites.

When it comes to the importance given to articles of the analyzed dailies that mention civil society, they were relatively prominent, mostly placed on pages 4th to 13th, while a smaller part of the articles were also located in the last several pages, dedicated to culture, and only few were occupying the first three pages. Overall, civil society is given relatively high importance by the media, but mostly pertaining to current events such as protests of workers, negotiations about status of workers etc., while the "regular" actions and long-term processes are less present and less prominent.

In most of the cases, civil society actors are mentioned in a neutral context. There were only six instances of positive and three instances of negative valence of reporting on civil society, all being a result of the quoted evaluations by the media sources and pertaining to specific actors/cases. While such overall neutral reporting might be considered a desirable practice, in accordance with the concept of journalistic objectivity, it was however also accompanied with overall disengagement of media outlets in terms of the lack of depth of reporting and lack of its political potential. Even when initial elements for building political relevance are included in the text, for example the collocutors directly criticize specific policy of local governance[18], media outlets rarely provide extensive information and in-depth insights that would verify the claims included in the text, provide more information on the accountability and any suggestions about the needed policy changes. This analysis revealed that dailies still provide more background information compared to the online news media.

Articles often included statements that point to the problems faced by certain citizens, and provided indicators of accountability of officials for

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[18] See for example article published here: http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/radnici-gikil-a-blokirali-magistralni-put-upitan-je-opstanak-hiljadu-porodica/160516035, and here http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/radnici-gikil-a-blokirali-magistralni-put-upitan-je-opstanak-hiljadu-porodica/160516035

these problems, and sometimes were even missing crucial information for understanding the issue and accountability for the identified problems[19]. For example, claims about poor conditions in student dorms, evaluations about the compromised judiciary in the context of processing war crimes, information on the failure of the government to submit the draft law on war veterans in the parliamentary procedure, information on disempowered workers in particular companies, claims on the parts of IPA funds the government failed to use, about debt of the government towards farmers, and many other issues, were all covered by the analyzed media, but without providing additional information that would help users to judge the situation, government accountability, needed government actions and potential means of citizen participation.

Judging by the analyzed content, while there is an overall diversity of news sources at the level of the entire sample, rarely are the voices of both, the civil society and public sector on particular issues presented in the same article. This limits insights for those that are not regular readers of such media, and in general suggest that the analyzed mainstream media rarely serve as a platform in which the two sectors communicate. In fact, officials were rarely consulted for statements about criticism by civil society, which can be justified with the imperatives of fast news production in these types of media, but also can be argued to be contributing to a sort of normalization of the practice in which the officials sometimes might be criticized, but are rarely if at all specifically called for accountability and engaged in dialogue with the public.

The very core of the media system, as well as the editorial policies of online news outlets and dailies oriented towards short and swift daily reporting is not conducive to in-depth investigation and analyses[20] and therefore the results of the analysis are largely lacking. However, even under such limitations, some background information can be sought and provided, as illustrated in a minority of the analyzed articles.

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[19] For example, while other media published an article about the part of IPA funds that the government failed to use, Oslobođenje clearly states it was due to the inability of leading officials to come to an agreement and it furthermore spells out a need for the policy steps towards informing the public and setting up a web platform that will facilitate the use and access to IPA funds. Article "IPA fondovi nisu humanitarna pomoć", Oslobođenje, 3 jun 2016.

[20] On scarcity of investigative reporting see for example MSI Irex reports, and Hodzic, S. 2004. Chapter on BiH in Petković and Bašić-Hrvatin (ed). Media Integrity Matters. Peace Institute. Available at: http://mediaobservatory.net/radar/media-integrity-matters-%E2%80%93-book-see-media-observatory

In few analyzed articles the media missed the opportunity to critically review and distance itself from the problematic statements of state officials,[21] which suggest that the minimum critical distance from the statements of the sources is sometimes missing. By contrast, for example, an article published by Oslobođenje provided a simple yet a decisive intervention. Namely, in an article from 3 July 2016, titled "Dijelite sudbinu ukupnih prilika u RS-u" ["You share the faith of the overall circumstances in RS"], the claim in the title directed by an official to the pensioners implies unwarranted relativization of both the position of a marginalized population of citizens, as well as accountability for social problems. Without the need to engage in an extensive research, the journalist confronts such a claim simply by providing information that the official was driven to and back from this meeting by a helicopter, thus indicating that political elites, i.e. "not everyone shares the same destiny".

Several articles within the sample stood out because of well-selected sources, which provided thorough information, analysis and information on needed legislative and policy changes. In the period of reporting on protests by workers because of difficult working conditions and violation of labor rights, an article[22] in which a trade union organization pointed out a few major problems that contribute to such a situation and urge for the revision of privatization in accordance to the law and for stipulations of the law on bankruptcy procedure to be changed, provides an important contribution to insights into these interrelated problems.

Another example of a good practice was an article published by website klix.ba[23]. Besides an analysis by a well-selected expert on the issue of overt spending by the public sector, it also provided a list of previously published articles about new employments in the public sector (despite a moratorium on new hiring). This is a simple contribution that backed up the claims of the media sources and by which they were given greater leverage.

The results of the analysis additionally point to a still pervading fragmentation of the media sector, in particular when it comes to the topics and cases that carry particular ethnic relevance. This was mostly identifiable in online articles about anniversaries of particular war crimes, as well as

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[21] For example in an article published 28 April 2016 by Nezavisne novine titled "*Najznačajnije resore u Vladi RS treba da vode novi ljudi*", the report by Center for Civic Initiatives was quoted by the official as a proof that u 2015 "the National Assembly of Republika Srpska was more efficient than the Parliament FBiH and Parliamentary Assembly BiH, a statement that remained unchallenged and uncoupled with any evidence or counter-evidence.

[22] For example, see article here: http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/savez-samostalnih-sindikata-nikad-gore-stanje-u-privredi-i-realnom-sektoru/160526068

[23] The article is available here: http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/maligno-tkivo-ekonomije-drzavne-institucije-i-firme-u-bih-imaju-240-000-zaposlenih/160610033

about the position of war veterans, victims and families, where media outlets are still functioning as separate spaces divided by ethic and entity lines, reporting mainly on "our" victims and "their" crimes. Fragmentation is also partly visible in the selection of topics and sources, with media covering more the events and developments from the same entity that the outlet is based on.

And finally, reporting on the civil sector does not seem to be based on any strategic orientation and thought-through approach by the media, but rather on an *ad hoc* approach, reporting on everyday events, such as protests of workers, different events, statements and press releases by civil society. As suggested by several respondents of this research, while civil society actions and ideas are more likely to get coverage, but also to receive criticism from certain political actors and the affiliated media, they are mostly related to party-political topics[24]. The issues that are related to "softer" politics or that relate more to technical matters will not be faced with similar hostility but media will, in general, show less interest[25]. Reporting on marginalized groups and civil society that is engaging on promoting their rights is mostly politically correct in the mainstream media, but they also involve some prejudice, while there are also websites that publish radically hostile content concerning LGBT rights[26].

How civil society views the media: neither allies nor adversaries

Respondents of this research for the most part consider media partly as passive allies of civil society, partly as their adversaries, but, lamentably, not active allies in the struggle for transparency and good governance. Experiences of our respondents vary, and while the majority believes information from civil society mostly gets fair media coverage, some also point to the examples of media denying access to civil society organizations or negative labeling of those organizations as foreign mercenaries[27].

The media community is primarily polarized about issues related to transitional justice and facing the past. Goran Zorić from the youth

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[24] For example Amra Hodžić of the Radio Federation BiH, submitted questionnaire, June 2016. Anti-corruption initiatives and analyses of political parties.

[25] As noted by Edin Hodžić from the Centar for Social Research Analitika, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

[26] Most often mentioned in this regard is website Saff.

[27] Examples mentioned by Amra Hodžić from Radio Federation BiH are part of a campaign against Amnesty international BiH through few major media in Republika Srpska, or publishing of information on salaries in the Centre of Civic Initiatives with the aim of discrediting them

organization Kvart speaks of his experiences with the latest example of: "refusal of Kozarski vijesnik to publish a mentioning about ... kids killed in Prijedor. There are also the distorted reports by RTRS about this event"[28]. However, Zorić mentioned few good examples of cooperation with media concerning the same topic. "One of the positive examples was an article by Dragan Bursać, published at website Buka, reporting on two murdered children and the fight for the memorial for the children killed in Prijedor. We jointly backed it up with facts and the information we had. Or for example when we asked a journalist of Radio Free Europe to report on Ljubija and after the report which described catastrophic circumstances in which people there are living, there was a huge response by people that wanted to help".

Civil society initiatives that jeopardize or involve criticism against particular officials or parties risk to attract criticism and to be covered in a politicized manner by part of the media. Ivana Korajlić of the Transparency International BiH from her experience mentioned media in Republika Srpska, mainly RTRS, Nezavisne novine and Glas Srpske for politicized reporting on the civil sector, but also points out that the examples of fair reporting on the civil sector are much more numerous[29].

Beyond politically-sensitive topics, the reasons for lack of substantial, engaged and continuous reporting on civil society in general are numerous, involving lack of resources, but also editorial orientation away from public interest and towards sensationalism and commercialized content. Media are believed to be increasingly relying on ready-made content, including that coming from the civil society[30]. Several respondents also noted that media do not sufficiently recognize the value of different reports and analyses by CSOs, nor do they acknowledge the quality of information and knowledge they can acquire from the sector. Meliha Sendić from the Center for legal help for Women, Zenica, noted that continuous reporting is mainly related to the media actions that are financially supported[31]. Zoran Ivaničić notes that media got so accustomed to paid announcements that they often ask for financial compensation for publishing convent related to issues of public interest. On the other hand, several respondents also point out that part of the reason for flawed reporting by mainstream media is the lack of understanding of civil society on how media function and what they regard as newsworthy. Press releases are often written in a format that is not interesting for the media, respondents from the media outlets indicated. As Almir Panjeta from Slobodna Bosna noted, the press releases are often too long and unclear since some key

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[28] Interview, 3 June 2016.
[29] Telephone interview, 3 June 2016.
[30] As suggested by Goran Zorić.
[31] Submitted questionnaire, June 2016

information is often missing. Furthermore, the entire communication by civil society is focused on press releases only, and the subject of the communication is not well-thought, suggests Goran Zorić from Kvart, adding that civil society organizations communicate more about the activities than about the ideas and values that should be in the center of attention. Civil society is largely passive and closed in relation to media, unwilling to share more information and provide comments when asked by the media[32], but also it is largely project-oriented, without a long-term strategic focus on certain issues that would make them relevant participants in communication on those issues beyond duration of particular projects[33].

Too often, the quality of relations between the media and civil society depend on the engagement and sensitization of individual journalists[34], instead of being part of strategic orientation of either media outlets or the civil society actors. This lack of strategic approach is visible in the difference between regular reporting and reporting on particular dates relevant for particular issues. As noted by Vedrana Frašto from Foundation CURE, reporting on women rights organizations on 8th of March is mostly politically correct, but: "In other situations, if media report on marginalized groups or the NGO sector, they will mostly report with stereotypes and sensationalism."[35] Overall, there is no continuous and in-depth reporting on public-interest issues or analyses on the role of civil society and its value for local communities[36]. As noted by one of the respondents: "NGOs work on important projects – for example safe houses for victims of violence, other social services, participation in discussions and decision-making on different levels of governance, legislative changes, democratic dialogue on important issues. However, such actions are mostly not in the focus of the media, which is more inclined towards simplified... visions of the nongovernmental sector"[37].

Despite these problems, respondents believe that in the majority of cases, important actions and ideas from civil society get an overall fair media coverage, although possibly not by all media. Few respondents mention positive examples of media coverage, mainly coverage of the campaign "I

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[32] Both journalists (Rubina Čengić, Marija Arnautović) and civil society representatives (Goran Zorić, Ivana Korajlić)

[33] Rubina Čengić, of magazine Start for example points to these problems.

[34] As noted by Huremović and Frašto, submitted questionnaires, June 2016.

[35] Submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

[36] As indicated for example by Zoran Ivačnić, activist, submitted questionnaire, June 2016. On the other hand, an example of negative campaign based on superficial arguments about the abundant foreign funding for actions of allegedly no public interests, is available here: http://novi.ba/clanak/73149/majstori-ublehe-najvece-zvijezde-granta-u-bosni-i-hercegovini?page=1

[37] Edin Hodžić, Center for Social Research Analitika, Sarajevo.

am Museum," an initiative which resulted in the re-opening of the National Museum in Sarajevo, as well as coverage of protests from 2013 (Bebolution or JMBG protests)[38] after which the problem with issuing new identification numbers got firstly a temporary and later a permanent solution.

Journalist Rubina Čengić of magazine Start mentions few good experiences of cooperation with civil society actors: "The best experience was with Transparency International; I had a journalistic assignment to do an interview with young people that experienced or observed some cases of corruption and they (TI) helped me a lot with some contacts, invited me to events attended by young people who discuss corruption"[39].

In terms of overall communication with civil society and between different sectors, the respondents agree that the role of social networks and blogs,[40] as well as some non-governmental platforms, is becoming more and relevant. Civil society organizations are increasingly using social networks in their communication practices, especially those related to the younger population. As one of our respondents said: "We are an organization that deals with youth and the use of social networks is very important for us. The initiative "Because I am concerned" (Jer me se tiče) communicates its entire engagement through social networks" (Goran Zorić, organization Kvart, Prijedor). However, media are still considered pivotal for the overall reach of civil society initiatives, as well in terms of fostering citizen participation (more below).

Bodies where the civil society and media almost meet

While the laws on public service broadcasters envisage the existence of editorial or program councils, in practice, only Radio Television of Republika Srpska (RTRS), one out of three public service broadcasters has established this advisory body[41]. In theory, the body includes participants from different

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[38] As noted for example by Almir Panjeta, Slobodna Bosna, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

[39] She also adds that the founders of an NGO are simultaneously owners of magazine Start, which fosters their cooperation on many topics. Rubina Čengić, magazine Start, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

[40] Two respondents for example mention that blog of Srđan Puhalo is increasingly accepted and reach significant respondents, and that it provides engaged analysis on socially relevant issues reporting of media (submitted questionnaires, June 2016).

[41] As noted by Radenko Udovičić, previous member of the Board of Governors on public service broadcaster RTVFBiH, the reasons that the Program Council does not exist are mostly procedural, since the several calls for Council members the response was not enough to enable all conditions for their appointment to be fulfilled (members from different cantons, from different constituents, minorities, members of different associations…), but he also adds that this is probably welcomed by the management since it's easier for them to make decisions without such advisory interference (Telephone conversation, 15 June 2016)

segments of society, including the civil sector. In the case of RTRS, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska appointed them. Radmila Žigić, a former member of the Program Council of RTRS noted that under the circumstances in which the public service system is almost by "default" in the function of the ruling political structures, for the few years this body had found a way to influence the program and contribute to better representations of different interests of citizens[42]. The situation soon changed: "When it became somewhat clear that we are not going to act as defenders of editorial policy of RTRS... the role of the Program council was reduced to a formality. We met two times a year to give our opinion on the Winter and Summer programmatic scheme". "This is how the Program Council functions today", she added[43].

The Communications Regulatory Agency (CRA) is a public body with a decisive role in the protection of the public interests and regulation in the sector of broadcasting. The credibility of CRA is increasingly questioned in recent years, one of the reasons being the perceived politicized appointments of members of the CRA Council. The amendments to the Law on Communications, adopted in 2012, introduced an *ad hoc* body that is proposing the list of 14 candidates for the CRA Council. While the body consists of the same number of political representatives and the representatives of civil society, and thus seems as a step towards greater participation in decision-making, in fact, the selection of the members of the ad hoc body is done by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and is designed to assure the dominance of political interests[44]. Therefore, it is not considered that this change contributed to better representation of citizen's interests in these procedures. On the contrary, under strong political interference, even the stipulation in the Law on Communication on gender equality is completely disregarded, since the current composition of the Council does not include a single female member.[45]

Finally, the Press Council in BiH oversees the self-regulatory system in the print and online sector. Its Board of Directors and Assembly consist

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[42] Although the consultations between the public and the Council were never introduced despite the initiative by the members of the Council, Žigić ads.

[43] Telephone interview, 16 June 2016.

[44] Furthermore, the list proposed by the ad hoc body is sent first to the Council of Ministers, whose role remains unclear, and then submitted to the parliamentary procedure. In case the Parliamentary Assembly does not approve the proposed candidates, the entire procedure has to be repeated and practically no limitations in this regard are specified.

[45] Having said this, it is important to also note that there have not been significant critique of the way that CRA processes the complaints concerning the program of the broadcasters, but rather critiques on the lack of reactions in some cases and lack of monitoring of media content, so in this aspect of the CRA functioning, the interests of the citizens are relatively protected.

of the members coming from the media community, but the Complaints Commission, which processes complaints concerning content published by online and print media, includes members from different sectors. Out of ten members, three come from universities, three from the judiciary and four from the media[46]. The Press Council is one of the most respected self-regulatory bodies in the region, contributing to the protection of citizen interests and promotion of journalistic values, and the composition of its managing bodies has not been substantially criticized.

Media-related nongovernmental organizations: providing what is missing in the mainstream media

Some of the media outlets that are registered as non-profit and non-governmental organizations play an important role in terms of the diversity of media offered in the country. In fact, the Center for Investigative Journalism, Žurnal and Buka are most frequently mentioned as media sources that provide either investigative journalism pieces or valuable content independent from the influence of the local political and economic centers of power.

In addition to these media outlets, there are also several online sources that are registered and/or are functioning as nongovernmental organizations that, through different activities (research, different analyses, educational programs, online platforms, events etc.), focus on freedom of expression and media-related issues. In a way, they belong to both the media community and civil society. Such organizations are recognized by our interviewees and surveyed respondents as valuable for several reasons, mainly because they provide relatively systematic and constant analysis of media policies and media practices. Judging by the evaluation of the respondents, online platforms such as media.ba or analiziraj.ba, are recognized as relevant and reliable sources of information for and about the media community. Other platforms of civil society are a valuable contribution to communication about particular issues of public relevance[47]. Some of these platforms were considered to have provided a valuable contribution during citizen protests, by countering the unfavorable reporting about the protests by the mainstream media and providing missing accounts on events (for example AbrasMEDIA and media.ba). At times, social media platforms provided

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[46] Source: Press council, more at: http://english.vzs.ba/index.php?option=com_co ntent&view=article&id=585%3Ainformation-on-the-press-council-in-bosnia-herzegovina&catid=7%3Aabout-us&Itemid=10&lang=en

[47] An example is a platform on position and rights of people with disabilities, at: http:// ukljuci.in/bs/, as mentioned by respondent Almir Panjeta, of magazine Slobodna Bosna.

alternative narratives, involving personal testimonies and citizen reports on police brutality, marginalized in mainstream media.

Although they are providing an important alternative, the respondents noted that the reach of these platforms is still limited to relatively closed circles of users. As Aleksandar Brezar from online platform analiziraj.ba said"...it will take time for the society to become digitally more literate, or that the shift of generations happens, in which these platforms will become more relevant than other media."[48]

Both of the types of organizations, both the journalistic platforms and platforms related to journalism, are mainly funded by international donors, who on one side foster editorial independence and critique of local centers of power, but on the other also bring uncertainty with regard to their long-term sustainability.

Media, civil society, and public participation

Mainstream media are considered to hold the power for mass citizen mobilization, but that this power has been mostly underused because media fail to report more substantially on issues of public interest. In some cases, this power has also been largely misused, and the respondents in particular mention favoritism towards official sources and perspectives that many mainstream media demonstrated during the February citizen protests in 2014.

Secondary sources suggest that mainstream media, in the end, contributed to the demise of the protests[49]. Lack of in-depth information and details about the issues relevant for the protests, initial focus on protest violence, perseverance of visual representation of violence in media reports long after the outburst of violence stopped, uncritical coverage of spinning against protests originating from government officials (promoting ethnic-national divides and pointing to alleged criminal behavior of protesters) were some of the factors that diverted the focus from the protests rationale and demands. While social networks, in particular Facebook, were identified as crucial platforms for informing and mobilizing citizens, the same report suggested that televised communication is decisive for the wider reach, sustainability of protest actions and for achieving the desired changes.

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[48] Interview, 22 June 2016.

[49] It is important to note that the results of content analysis within the same research did support such evaluations only in part. See Cvjetićanin, T, in Hodžić and Pajnik (ed.). Foundation "Mediacentar", 2016.

Respondents of this research recognize the importance of social networks in fast exchange of information and interactivity, and as platforms through which citizens were mobilized for few massive protests. Beyond these few cases, the respondents indicate that the role of social networks remains confined to the discussion between a relatively closed group of people, and also noted that they include few problematic aspects as well. One of the respondents additionally noted that the practices can be as (un)democratic as the society in general "how much is this alternative space more democratic and to what extent is it on the other hand merely mirroring a divided society"[50], while others also mentioned a problem of questionable reliability of information shared on social networks. Beyond the few exceptions, much of the "activities on social networks mainly remain on the margins, in separate space which is construed and maintained as elitist, without meaningful outflow to traditional media and to society, or the citizens" noted one of the respondents[51].

When it comes to mainstream media, as noted earlier, the results of content analysis suggest that the analyzed print and online news media rarely provide in-depth information and analysis, that they do not cover issues promoted by civil sector in a systematic manner, and mostly do not promote dialogue between media and civil society on issues of public interest or explore government accountability. As such, these media do not act as major initiators and promoters of public participation. However, where there is an initiative with strong message and strong support, mainstream media seem to be necessary for reaching the wider citizens support and/or for achieving a policy impact. Even considerable media reporting on certain issues and support for civil society initiatives does not necessarily lead to desired results. For example, the reaction of the Center for Legal Help for Women, in the town of Zenica about the fact that the Government of the Zenica-Doboj Canton did not involve a single female minister had a considerable echo in the media, but this has not led to any changes. "We still have a small number of women in the executive power", noted Meliha Sendić[52].

Lack of responsiveness by political officials, despite different platforms used for communication and increased opportunities for interactions, is the main problem. Civil society is overall portrayed as a valuable contributor to public discussions that foster citizen participation, but their strength in achieving policy changes is seen as minor[53], if faced with hostile or

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[50] Edin Hodžić, Centar of Social Research Analitika, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Submitted questionnaire, June 2016.
[53] See for example Keil, S and Perry, K, 2016, State Building and Democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rutledge.

unresponsive mainstream media and/or with unresponsive decision-makers. As respondents indicate, part of the problem is also the lack of unified efforts by civil society for important changes, and the lack of an "institutionalized platform for consultations between the public and institutions"[54].

Conclusions

Neither media nor civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina is believed to be substantially contributing to public participation. There are six main and interconnected reasons identified in this research: a) weak messages by civil society (often focused on their activities instead of the overall ideas and policy requirements) and lack of know-how and capacities to present them in a newsworthy manner b) lack of public-interest engagement and continuous reporting by the media, as well as political interference in editorial policies c) lack of joint engagement of different segments of civil society, d) lack of joint engagement of both civil society and media in persistent promotion of issues of public interest, f) lack of responsiveness of the officials to such initiatives and pressures, and d) lack of wider citizen engagement.

Several positive examples of media reporting and few examples of cooperation between media and civil society organizations mentioned in this report can offer some guidelines for both the media and civil society actors. Namely, small engagement by the media, such as pointing to further sources on particular issues, providing multiple views, distancing from problematic statements can make an important difference even when media do not have the resources or mission that involve investigative and in-depth reporting. Civil society on the other hand should also rethink the messages they are communicating towards media and instead of mainly promoting the civil society actions *per se* aim to promote the main ideas and suggestions on how to improve services and decisions of the public sector. Civil society actors should also develop their practices and communication skills with the media, including more continuous, strategic communication, organizing interesting events and writing good press releases. Improvement of mutual communication and cooperation between media and civil society on issues of public interest is indicated as a needed step towards greater public participation. Additionally, structural changes in terms of greater independence from local stakeholders and in terms of more strategic orientation of both media and civil society organizations towards issues of public interest should also be pursued as long-term goals.

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[54] As Ivana Korajlić of TI noted.

Finally, developing institutionalization mechanisms of consultations between officials and the public should assure greater responsiveness of institutions and greater impact of civil society initiatives on the decision-making processes. Both media and civil society can play a crucial role in examining the responsiveness of the governments and investigating if and how they are building in the civil society voices in their policy processes. Only when this is turned into themes in the public discourse in a more substantial way will the participation be recognized by the authorities as a necessary means to demonstrate their democratic credentials.

One should also not underestimate the importance of the civil sector in disseminating support and providing services to particular groups of people, in providing information that would otherwise be difficult to access, or in offering different education programs, which in their own right bring relevant benefits for the society.

KOSOVO

Synergized in Struggle

Krenar Gashi*

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* Department of Political Science, Ghent University, Belgium, Krenar.Gashi@UGent.be

Old and New Media in a New Country

For a country that is both young and small, Kosovo has an oversaturated media scene. For somewhat less than two million Kosovars, there are 7 daily newspapers, 21 TV stations, out of which 3 with national frequencies, and as many as 83 radio stations.[1] While an Independent Media Commissioner regulates the broadcast media, the print media run a self-regulatory body – the Press Council of Kosovo. The number of online media remains unknown with estimates showing up to 30 websites that provide news and analysis on a daily basis.[2] Blogs, albeit a new phenomenon, are also flourishing, making the media scene both vibrant and pluralist. This crowded market, however, has a direct impact on financing of the media, as merely a few of them are self-sustainable. Several media outlets faced closure in the past few years, mainly due to lack of own revenues. As the Institute for Development Policy (INDEP) finds out in their annual The State of the Media in Kosovo report in 2015, 'the high number of media outlets provides for a serious dispersion of potential advertising revenue, preventing the formation of a group of highly professional and profitable organizations'.[3] When this situation is combined with the fact that some third of Kosovo's GDP is generated by the public sector, with government being the biggest advertiser, convenient conditions for government pressure against the media are created.

Sustainability, however, is only one of the problems that Kosovo media are facing. Editorial independence, violence and threats against journalists, as well as government interference, particularly in the public broadcasting

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[1] Independent Media Commission, Raporti Vjetor [Annual Report], http://www.kpm-ks.org/materiale/dokument/1400761852.6487.pdf.

[2] Author's interviews with journalists and editors in Kosovo, May 2016.

[3] Gashi, K. and Qavdarbasha, S. (2015) *The State of the Media in Kosovo*. Pristina: Institute for Development Policy (INDEP).

service, remain some of the ongoing challenges for journalists and media professionals alike.[4] Thus, in the eyes of international organizations, Kosovo media are considered to be struggling for their independence. In 2015, Reporters Without Borders ranked Kosovo in 90th place out of 180 countries that are featured in the World Press Freedom Index.[5] Freedom House ranks Kosovo media to be 'partly free' with their index showing 49, where 0 is the best and 100 the worst.[6] In Nations in Transit, another report that looks closely at media freedom, Freedom House ranks Kosovo media with a score of 5.25, where 1 is best and 7 is worst.[7] In the last three years, different legislative and practical developments have accounted for a slight change in the way Kosovo media are portrayed by international organizations. While Reporters Without Borders noted a decline in terms of press freedom, mainly focusing on threats against journalists, the Freedom House's Nations in Transit report highlights slight improvement, mainly relating it to the vibrancy and productivity of Kosovo journalists in spite of the environment where they operate. As a recently published report by OSCE in Kosovo rightly concludes, the freedom of Kosovo media is subject of a debate, whereas media experts more or less agree that the situation remains challenging in spite of improvements.

Legally speaking, Kosovo offers some of the highest standards of journalists' protection and media freedom. Article 40 of Kosovo's Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, Article 41 guarantees the right to access public documents, whereas Article 42 guarantees freedom and pluralism of the media.[8] The last one stipulates that censorship is forbidden: 'no one shall prevent the dissemination of information or ideas through media'.[9] These constitutional provisions are well backed by legislation. Libel has been categorized as a civil issue since 2006, whereas it is being fully implemented as such only since 2013, when the new Penal Code was enacted that does not foresee libel and slander as a penal offence. In the same year, the Kosovo Assembly passed the Law on Protection of Journalists' Sources, making Kosovo the first country in the region to provide this legal instrument for journalists' protection. As it was seen during the 2015 reporting on corruption in the EU rule of law mission in Kosovo (EULEX), the law is crucial to guarantee

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Reporters Without Borders (2016) World Press Freedom Index, https://rsf.org/en/ranking
[6] Freedom House (2016) Freedom of the Press, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2016
[7] Gashi, K. (2016) *Kosovo*, in Freedom House, *Nations in Transit,* https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2016/kosovo
[8] Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo (2008) Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo.
[9] Ibid

working conditions for investigative reporting.[10] If applied as it presently is, the law makes Kosovo a good example for the protection of journalists.

However, similar to the other policy fields, legislation on the media freedom lags in terms of implementation. Judicial institutions in Kosovo are still weak and overloaded, dealing with a significant backlog.[11] When it comes to cases of libel, slander, and especially to cases of violence and threats against journalists, the Courts are weak and cannot process cases in a timely manner. According to the experts interviewed for this research, it takes 3 to 5 years before such cases are put to trial. To this day, there has been no verdict in any case of threats or violence against journalists, in spite of the high number of such cases. In 2015 alone, the Association of Kosovo Journalists alone reported 25 cases where journalists were attacked.

Last, but definitely not least, the media in Kosovo are facing a problem of their own: professionalism. First of all, there is a systematic problem with media management. According to the data provided by the Institute for Development Policy as well as the Association of Kosovo Journalists, many journalists work for a minimum wage, very often without employment contracts. Research has shown that there is no distinction between the business arm of the media and their editorial one, that there are no clear indicators for the use of advanced marketing strategies, and that there are no specialized media.[12] IREX media sustainability index for 2016 highlighted that 'Kosovo media outlets are not doing enough to guarantee security for their journalists.[13] Secondly, most of the small and new media have no written editorial policies or codes of conduct. Systematic monitoring has shown that journalists usually report superficially on daily events, with feature stories, analysis and especially investigative reports being scarce.[14] In the eyes of media and civil society experts interviewed for this research, the quality of reporting has dropped with the entry into scene of the new online media, which focus on short stories with sensational titles, giving no space to context and proper analysis.

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[10] Gashi, K. (2016) *Kosovo*, in Freedom House, *Nations in Transit,* https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2016/kosovo

[11] European Commission (2014) Progress Report for Kosovo. Brussels.

[12] Gashi, K. and Qavdarbasha, S. (2015) *The State of the Media in Kosovo*. Pristina: Institute for Development Policy (INDEP)

[13] IREX (2016) Media Sustainability Index: Kosovo, https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2016-kosovo.pdf.pdf

[14] Ibid.

Kosovo: You bring the civil, we'll bring the society[15]

Although the first Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)[16] in Kosovo were established in the 1990s, the current civil society sector was vastly developed in the aftermath of the 1998-99 conflict. Being war-torn and administered by the United Nations, Kosovo was an attractive spot for many international NGOs and donor organizations, which shortly after landing established their spinoffs and were granting funds to local organizations. According to official data, more than 7,000 NGOs were registered in Kosovo since 1999.[17] The number of active NGOs, according to a survey conducted by the Institute for Development Policy and Lens, is around 2,200.[18] For a country of less than two million people, this number of active civil society organizations is considerably high.

The high number of operational NGOs comes as a result of a high-standard environment in which the civil society organizations operate. Freedom of association is guaranteed by Kosovo's Constitution. Article 44 of the Constitution specifies that this freedom includes 'the right of everyone to establish an organization without obtaining any permission, to be or not to be a member of any organization and to participate in the activities of an organization'.[19] This high standard of freedom of association is mirrored in the Law on Freedom of Association in NGOs, which requires minimal administrative procedures for the registration and operation of civil society organizations. According to this Law, NGOs in Kosovo can be registered as Associations, that is membership-based organizations, or as Foundations, which are without membership.

The relatively simple legal framework as well as civil society's own efforts have kept the state's involvement in the civil society affairs to a minimum. NGOs are neither exempted from Value Added Tax nor from income and

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[15] Eric Jarosinski, in Sbunker, Nein Quarterly and the Utopian Negation, available at Sbunker, http://sbunker.net/teh/81889/video-sbunker-nein-quarterly-dhe-mohimi-utopik/ (TC 00:50:00).

[16] The terms Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter. They both refer to not-for-profit entities, registered as per Kosovo's Law on Freedom of Association in NGOs, operating in Kosovo.

[17] Government of the Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Public Administration, Department for Registration and Liaison with NGOs, Official Website, https://map.rks-gov.net/Departments/DOJQ.aspx?lang=en-US

[18] Institute for Development Policy and Lens, *Bashkepunimi mes Qeverise se Kosoves dhe Shoqerise Civile* [Cooperation between the Government of Kosovo and the civil society], http://indep.info/?id=5%2C0%2C0%2C1%2Ca%2C153

[19] Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo (2008) *Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo*.

rent taxes. A special public beneficiary status is given to certain NGOs which enables them to operate VAT-free. The government has no direct supervisory powers over NGOs; the administrative procedure involves submitting annual narrative and financial reports to the Ministry of Public Administration, but this is not well implemented. The government cannot punish or shut down NGOs, except for specific cases when this can be done by a court. The simple legal framework, however, has its downsides, as it remains unclear whether NGOs have to pay taxes for generating own income, and whether NGOs can hold shares in for-profit enterprises, which would enable their sustainability.

When it comes to financial sustainability, the civil society sector in Kosovo is in a worse situation than the media one. The absolute majority of all civil society funds come from foreign donors, be that international organizations such as the EU, development agencies of foreign countries, or international foundations.[20] Government grants for NGOs are unregulated and happen on an ad-hoc basis. Civil society leaders that were interviewed for this research stated that they would not consider receiving grants from the government even in case they were available, as this would jeopardize their independence. At the same time, new emerging conflicts in world politics have caused many donor organization to leave Kosovo and focus elsewhere.[21] In spite of this, however, in its 2014 Civil Society Index, USAID concludes that sustainability of Kosovo's civil society has improved over the last few years, with advancements being made in terms of legal framework, advocacy, service provision and public image.[22] Within Kosovo's political system as well as the public sphere, civil society organizations have solid integrity and continuously influence both the public discourse and the policy agenda.

Kosovo's civil society scene is diverse, with NGOs varying from think tank and advocacy centers, to professional service-providing associations and foundations, to grassroots, student and youth organizations. In terms of shifts in the overall scope of work, the development of Kosovo's civil society is explained by theoretical frameworks of post-conflict reconstruction, which by and large suggest a shift from being oriented towards fast results in the first years after the conflict, towards more long-term and sustainable forms of engagement.[23] Given the latter, organizations that work on current affairs

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[20] Gashi, K. (2016) *Kosovo*, in Freedom House, *Nations in Transit,* https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2016/kosovo

[21] Gashi, K. (2014) *Kosovo*, in Freedom House, *Nations in Transit,* https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/kosovo

[22] USAID (2014) The 2014 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Asia, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1863/EuropeEurasia_FY2014_CSOSI_Report.pdf#page=129

[23] Musliu, V. (2016) Country Report: Kosovo, in Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Taking stock and looking ahead. Forthcoming. Vienna: Vienna University.

and public policy issues have established a stronger profile for themselves and it could be argued that they are more sustainable, despite the financial challenges. As a forthcoming paper by Vienna University rightly argues, civil society organizations in Kosovo 'have become increasingly sophisticated in promoting their visibility and utilizing media for public outreach as well as pressure'.[24] The extent to which the relationship between the media and CSOs has developed as well as the nature of this relationship is the scope of the analysis that follows.

Media coverage of civil society

Civil society organizations and activists are featured extensively in the Kosovo media, be that in terms of media reports on civil society activities or in terms of civil society activists providing independent expert opinions on current and policy affairs. It has become imperative for many journalists and editors, especially those of the more serious media outlets, to turn to civil society activists in order to balance their reporting. This is the case particularly on political stories and those dealing with policy issues that are high on the public agenda.

In this section, we shall explore the relationship between the Kosovo media and civil society organizations in the country. The primary corpus of data for this research comes from qualitative media monitoring. Three Kosovo dailies – Koha Ditore, Zeri and Kosova Sot – have been monitored alongside with three online media – Express, Blic and Kallxo – using the same methodology. Although the monitoring period was May – July 2016, this research takes into account other articles, published at an earlier period of time, as per their relevance to the analysis. For this purpose, a public domain inquiry was conducted to create a second corpus of data illustrating relations between media and civil society, including also coverage from other Kosovo media. The third corpus of data is gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with media and civil society experts in Kosovo.

The monitoring process enabled us to classify three kind of reports of the Kosovo media where civil society organizations or activists are featured: 1) media reports on CSO activities, be that press conferences, actions or any kind of other activities; 2) media analysis whereby civil society representatives are quoted in the capacity of experts; and 3) opinions and editorials published by civil society representatives. Since the first group of stories consists by far the vast majority of the media content and is of crucial importance to this research, it will be elaborated in greater detail than the other two.

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[24] *Ibid*

Civil society activities are to a great extent covered by the Kosovo media. When it comes to CSOs that operate in Pristina and mainly deal with public policy issues, this coverage is even more intensive and extensive. This phenomenon is noted throughout the monitoring period and in all the media that were monitored, albeit Koha Ditore and Koha.net have had by far more stories covering CSO activities than the others. In this spirit, for example, Kosovo media reported a conference organized by the Kosovo Civil Society Foundation (KCFS) whereby CSOs have demanded from the government not to interfere with their works.[25] Similarly, events and activities organized by leading Kosovo think tanks – Gap Institute, Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS), Institute for Development Policy (INDEP), Kosovo Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), Democracy 4 Development, Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI) – are usually widely covered. Other CSOs that deal with transparency and rule of law, such as Levizja Fol, receive even more extensive coverage, since these policy issues are very high on the public agenda.

When civil society organizations join forces for a particular issue or a cause, be that by formally establishing consortiums or merely working together on an ad-hoc basis, media tend to provide them with greater space and attention. To illustrate, NGO Ec Ma Ndryshe from the southern city of Prizren has received great support by other CSOs in their efforts to improve the local government in this city.[26] Their protest and demands for the resignation of the Mayor of Prizren were widely covered by the media.

Interviews with civil society and media experts, however, reveal that this coverage is not the same for all the CSOs, a finding confirmed by further public record research. As Burim Ejupi the director of INDEP admits straightforwardly, smaller and more rurally-based CSOs as well as those working on very professional themes receive less attention than the think tanks do.[27] Given the continuous presence of a few activists of civil society in the media, the definition of 'civil society' in Kosovo's public sphere is very often confined to a few think tanks and advocacy centers, whereas the majority of CSOs operating in Kosovo are somehow left out of the definition. In spite of this, the rise of the new media has created more space for other CSOs, even those operating outside of the capital Pristina. For an illustration,

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[25] Gazeta Blic (2016) Kerkohet qe shteti te mos nderhyje ne punen e OJQ-ve [Demands for state not to meddle in the works of NGOs], Gazeta Blic, 6 June 2017, http://gazetablic.com/kerkohet-qe-shteti-te-mos-nderhyje-ne-punen-e-organizatave-jo-qeveritare/

[26] Koha (2016) Protestuesit kerkojne doreheqjen e kryetarit dhe dy ministrave [Protesters demand resignation of the mayor and two ministers], 14 June 2016, http://koha.net/?id=27&l=118441

[27] Ejupi, B. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Burim Ejupi, executive director of INDEP and a civil society expert in Kosovo. Pristina, June 2016.

during the monitoring period all the media, but particularly Koha Ditore, have reported extensively on activities of CSOs operating in other cities, such as Prizren, Ferizaj, Lipjan and Klina, but also those of smaller and more rural towns. Such activities involved a variety of topics, from criticism toward local authorities,[28] to civic initiatives dealing with stray dogs,[29] to protection of workers' rights,[30] to teen marriage and pregnancy.[31] Thus, we can conclude that Kosovo media covers the activities of civil society to a great extent.

The tone of the coverage of civil society activities in the media is usually neutral, although interviewees for this research thought it was leaning towards a more positive tone, since in normal circumstances media and civil society organizations see each other as natural allies and partners. In this way, there is a kind of gentlemen-agreement between the two, whereby the media publish press releases and statements sent by CSOs as they are, usually without major interventions.[32] This neutrality, however, is jeopardized whenever a certain media or a CSO is seen as linked to a political party or a group of interest, whereby the tone can switch to a negative one.[33] Although cases where political parties or the government have used certain media to publicly attack a civil society organization or an activist are not frequent, they did happen in the past.[34] As Arben Ahmeti, a journalist, editor and former President of the Association of Kosovo Journalists puts it, 'in such cases we witness media offensives [against CSO activists] whereby journalists follow absolutely no professional standards'.[35] Ahmeti worries

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[28] Koha (2016) OJQ Koha kundershton mbylljen e qendres se qytetit te Klines [Koha NGO opposes closure of the centre of town of Klina], 10 June 2016, http://koha.net/?id=9&l=117838

[29] Koha (2016) Shoqëria civile në Ferizaj kërkon masa kundër qenve endacakë [Civil Society in Ferizaj demands measures against stray dogs], 21 June 2016, http://koha.net/?id=9&l=119577

[30] Koha (2016) Në Lipjan shkelen të drejtat e punëtorëve në sektorin publik e privat [Workers' rights in the public and private sector in Lipjan are violated], 18 June 2016, http://koha.net/?id=9&l=119120

[31] Koha (2016) Martesa nen 16 vjec eshte dhunim [Marriage under 16 means rape], 16 May 2016, http://koha.net/?id=27&l=113586

[32] Ejupi, B. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Burim Ejupi, executive director of INDEP and a civil society expert in Kosovo. Pristina, June 2016.

[33] Zhubi, D. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Driton Zhubi, executive director of NGO LENS. Pristina, June 2016.

[34] For example the case of 2009 when the pro-government newspaper Infopress had published a series of articles against the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, calling, among others, for a public lynch of its journalists. In another case, in 2011, the public broadcaster RTK used its main news edition to attack the author of the Freedom House's Nations in Transit report as they did not agree with the findings of this report on RTK.

[35] Ahmeti, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Arben Ahmeti, journalist and editor with Dukagjini TV station, former President of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo and a frequent media commentator. Pristina, June 2016.

that such cases bring a negative trend when it comes to implementation of journalistic standards in Kosovo, something in which the country has a somewhat better standing than its neighbors in the Western Balkans.[36] The negative tone of media reports on CSOs is present very much during election periods, as it has become a norm in Kosovo for political parties to recruit CSO activists and leaders just before kicking off their election campaigns. In such cases, the media see the civil society as part of politics.[37] Cases where the media have abused their power to attack civil society organizations or activists on the basis of ideologies and values have not been noted. On the contrary, there is an overall feeling of cooperation in such issues, as was for instance the wide promotion of LGBTI rights by both media and civil society, in response to attacks coming from conservative politicians.[38]

This relatively good but to some extent unhealthy relationship between media and civil society is revealed further when looking closely at the content of the monitored stories. The vast majority of the stories featuring civil society organizations were rather short and straightforward, whereby reporters simply explain an event or, in some cases, merely copy and paste a press release from an NGO. Most of the interviewees believe that journalists neither know nor care to know details about the work of civil society. The majority of journalists do not know which organization deals with what, they possess no in-depth knowledge of their activities, yet they still see them as partners, as they believe in the same system of liberal values, democracy, human rights, transparency and good governance.[39] This shallow reporting hinders the relationship between media and society and prevents the creation of a greater value-based synergy. This too, however, is improving slowly. More and more organizations are now facing different institutional and financial challenges thus they are focused on creating narrow profiles for themselves, which in turn results in greater professionalism.[40] Although many journalists see the NGOs as a homogenous group whereby all are the same,[41] this is slowly changing.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Koha Ditore, OJQ-te dalin ne mbrojtje te LGBTI, denojne deklaratat e Kelmendit [NGOs protect LGBTI rights, they condemn Kelmendi's statements], 18 May 2016, http://koha.net/?id=27&l=113951

[39] Gashi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Astrit Gashi, chairman of the board of Blic online media and a frequent commentator on media, civil society and politics. Pristina, June 2016.

[40] Ejupi, B. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Burim Ejupi, executive director of INDEP and a civil society expert in Kosovo. Pristina, June 2016.

[41] Gashi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Astrit Gashi, chairman of the board of Blic online media and a frequent commentator on media, civil society and politics. Pristina, June 2016.

The second type of media reports where civil society is featured are news analysis. These are in-depth longer stories, usually published in daily newspapers and less so in online portals. Civil society activists are featured in the capacity of experts or policy analysts. In most cases, such stories are of a political nature, thus the number of civil society activists featured in them is limited to researchers of think tanks.[42] During the monitoring period, however, we have noted other cases of less political topics where civil society activists were included, such as a story by Kosova Sot daily on the potential for reviving the tobacco agriculture in Kosovo.[43] It should be noted that the usage of social media has boosted significantly the inclusion of civil society in media reports. Many media outlets, particularly online media, publish statements, reactions and other information that civil society activists and organizations post on social media.

The third type of media presence that Kosovo CSOs get is through opinions and editorials. Many civil society leaders and activists have their regular or irregular columns in the press. Head of Riinvest Institute Lumir Abdixhiku writes a weekly column for Koha Ditore,[44] Agron Demi of the Gap Institute writes opinion pieces for various print and online media while Florian Qehaja of KCSF and Petrit Zogaj of Levizja Fol blog regularly at sbunker.net,[45] to name a few. This pool of opinion-writers who are leaders of some of the most important NGOs has further strengthened the capacity of Kosovo's civil society to shape and influence public opinion. Civil society leaders have a similar presence also in the televised media, but it would exceed the scope of this research to explore it further.

Friends, foes, or in between?

As the previous analysis of the coverage has already shown, Kosovo media and civil society organizations, in principle, see each other as a kind of steady partner. For many NGOs, their core activities depend on media coverage. This is especially the case for think tanks and advocacy groups, which focus on providing policy solutions to policy-makers. As the interviews for this research reveal, media attention and coverage is of crucial importance to such

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[42] See for example, Popova, E. (2016), Mandati I EULEX ne zgrip ndersa BE shperfill Thacin [Mandate of EULEX on the brink as the EU ignores Thaci], Kallxo, 14 June 2016, http://kallxo.com/gjnk/mandati-eulex-ne-zgrip-ndersa-shperfill-thacin/

[43] Kosova Sot (2016) Arat e Anamoraves do te mbushen serish me duhan [Anamorava land to be planted with tobacco again] 1 June 2016, http://www.kosova-sot.info/lajme/106393/arat-e-anamoraves-do-te-mbulohen-serish-me-duhan/

[44] Abdixhiku, L. (2016) Brezovica dhe deshtimi I pritur [Brezovica and the expected failure], Koha Ditore, 27 June 2016, http://koha.net/?id=31&o=1319

[45] Sbunker, http://www.sbunker.net

CSOs as they need to raise the awareness of the public on the policy issues they are dealing with.[46] For smaller, more professional CSOs, working jointly with the media is a must in order to receive the attention of the public.[47] CSOs that are not based in the capital Pristina have less access to policy-makers and their only way to have their voice heard is through the media.[48] Thus many CSOs now have appointed specific personnel to deal with media and public relations, although in most of them this is not an exclusive full-time job.

Many civil society organizations are directly involved in projects with media or journalists' organizations. While a few years back the Association of Journalists of Kosovo drafted its development strategy jointly with Institute for Development Policy, during the monitoring period it published a Manual for the Prevention of Corruption in the Public Sector jointly with the Kosovo Democratic Institute.[49] The Association, as well as many other media individually, has implemented different projects jointly with other civil society organizations.

Journalists and media executives are aware of the importance of the civil society sector for their day-to-day work. However, as the interviews for this research reveal, journalists and editors know little detail about the work of civil society. A good portion of journalists and editors do not know which organization deals with what issues; they are more driven to know individuals, researchers or leaders of CSOs rather than the organizations themselves.[50] It happens often that journalists would not even read materials published by civil society but would prefer to interview activists or leaders instead.[51] Materials offered by the civil society are used by the media but merely for superficial and brief reporting whereas research findings of many NGOs are hardly ever consulted by journalists and there is no follow-up reporting.[52] [53]

[46] Ejupi, B. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Burim Ejupi, executive director of INDEP and a civil society expert in Kosovo. Pristina, June 2016.

[47] Zhubi, D. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Driton Zhubi, executive director of NGO LENS. Pristina, June 2016.

[48] Demi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Agron Demi, executive director of Gap Institute. Pristina, June 2016.

[49] Halimi, V. (2016) Publikohet udhezuesi per parandalimin e korrupsionit [Corruption Prevention Manual published], Zeri, 14 June 2016, http://zeri.info/aktuale/94322/publikohet-udhezuesi-per-parandalimin-e-korrupsionit-ne-prokurimin-publik/

[50] Gashi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Astrit Gashi, chairman of the board of Blic online media and a frequent commentator on media, civil society and politics. Pristina, June 2016.

[51] Demi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Agron Demi, executive director of Gap Institute. Pristina, June 2016.

[52] Zhubi, D. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Driton Zhubi, executive director of NGO LENS. Pristina, June 2016.

[53] Ahmeti, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Arben Ahmeti, journalist and editor with Dukagjini TV station, former President of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo and a frequent media commentator. Pristina, June 2016.

At the same time, not all the CSOs have the capacity or the know-how to deal with the media[54] resulting in few CSOs being featured extensively.

Frictions between CSOs and the media happen especially during election campaigns. Many journalists and media professionals see civil society activists as part of the political system that are merely using the civil society as a 'trampoline' to 'jump' into politics.[55] It is during these times that media reports on civil society organizations and individuals become somewhat negative. There are also cases where entities registered as NGOs are involved in wrongdoings, for which the Kosovo media have a kind of 'no mercy' policy. Such was the case of some NGOs involved in a suspicious scheme of agricultural grants provided by the government, for which the media have reported extensively.[56] Thus, in spite of an informal partnership that exists between media and civil society, frictions between the two are also present.

Media operating as NGOs

It is important to make a digression from the analysis in order to elaborate on a special category of the media: those operating as NGOs. Although the media can be considered to be part of the wider definition of civil society, the Kosovo media that operate as NGOs are indeed a kind of a hybrid, as their interests are those of other media as well as other NGOs.

The exact number of the media registered as NGOs is not known. The number used to be very high in the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict, where many media, particularly radio stations, were registered as NGOs. With Kosovo's economy being destroyed and with no real media market in place, they saw international donors as the only way for financial sustainability. In due time, however, some of them were either closed or turned to operate as businesses, although a number of them still remains. Below, we shall explore the activities of some of the most-known media NGOs.

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) is a regional media organization that operates as NGO. In Kosovo, they produce two current affairs TV programs, two online publications in the Albanian language and the third one in English. Their profile is more in-depth and investigative reporting.[57] Another NGO, Cohu, which initially dealt with transparency, anti-corruption and civic activism, has established Kosovo's Centre for

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[54] Ibid
[55] Ibid
[56] Preportr (2016) Tu prashitë n'ujë [Harrowing on the Water], Blic Newspaper, 24 May 2016, http://gazetablic.com/tu-prashite-nuje/
[57] BIRN (2016) Official Website, www.birn.eu.com

Investigative Journalism which publishes Preportr, an online magazine featuring investigative stories.[58] Kosovo 2.0 is an online blogging platform and magazine that focuses more on societal and cultural issues and publishes in three languages: Albanian, Serbian and English.[59] Sbunker, is a recently established blog that promotes in-depth debates on political and social affairs.[60] All these media put forth their editorial independence as one of the main reasons why they continue to operate as NGOs.

Comparing the quality of reporting, at a glance, media that operate as NGOs tend to be better, applying stricter and higher professional standards of journalism. At the same time, however, they do create a kind of unfair competition for other media, who still have to struggle for their income.[61] The sustainability of media that operate as NGOs is highly questionable.

Civil Society and media regulatory authorities

Given it's contemporary constitution that provides guarantees for civic and press liberties, Kosovo has constructed a good legal framework when it comes to representation of civil society in state regulatory bodies. The implementation of this framework, however, is lagging behind. Below, we shall explore what happens when media and civil society meet their interest in the cases of two regulatory bodies: the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the public broadcasting service Radio Television Kosovo (RTK). The boards of both these institutions should consist, among others, of civil society representatives. This research shows that this representation, however, is not happening in practice and is rather being abused by political parties.

The board of IMC as well as the one of RTK are elected through a public and to some extent transparent procedure, which, although regulated by different laws, is essentially the same.[62] Civil society organizations are invited to nominate people for the respective boards, but this invitation is not exclusive as anybody can be part of the nomination process. A parliamentary committee consisting of all political parties is then established to interview the nominees. The committee compiles a list of selected candidates for each position and submits it to the plenary session, where board members

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[58] Preportr (2016) Official Website of Cohu, http://preportr.cohu.org/sq/per-ne
[59] Kosovo 2.0 (2016) Official Website, www.kosovotwopointzero.com
[60] Sbunker (2016) Official Website, www.sbunker.net
[61] Gashi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Astrit Gashi, chairman of the board of Blic online media and a frequent commentator on media, civil society and politics. Pristina, June 2016.
[62] The Law on Radio Television Kosovo and the Law on Independent Media Commission.

are elected by a simple majority vote. None of the experts interviewed for this research believe that the procedure is sufficient to ensure appropriate representation of civil society.

The fact that the parliamentary committee in charge of the selection of candidates represents the political parties as per their political power makes this process of selection entirely political.[63] Furthermore, legal provisions only enable civil society to nominate candidates but the Committee does not have to select candidates who represent civil society; they can represent anybody.[64] As a consequence, virtually all candidates that are appointed in these regulatory bodies are political clients, which leave civil society organizations and especially the media in an unsatisfactory position.[65] Taking a glance at the media reports on the selection procedure for these two important boards gives an impression of a great synergy between the efforts of CSOs and the media to stop this bad practice from happening, but unfortunately without yielding any results. Tens of media reports highlighted nomination of political clients for the boards of IMC and RTK boards yet all the joint public pressure with CSOs was not successful. In the eyes of the interviewees consulted for this research, the situation is bleak given the ability of political parties to outsmart the current system and inability of the media and CSOs to change it in such a way that it could guarantee proper representation of civil society.

Media and CSOs have a better track record when cooperating in the self-regulatory body Kosovo Press Council, which regulates the press and some online media. Given that the Press Council is also seen as part of the civil society, numerous institutes and research centers have implemented continuous joint projects with the Council.

Synergizing struggle: the power of media and civil society in Kosovo

Although the efforts of Kosovo media and CSOs to establish independent and professional regulatory bodies that can implement the wide freedoms guaranteed by the constitution cannot be rated as successful, when it comes to influencing public agenda and discourse the situation is much different. In many policy cases, including some of the most controversial policies in

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[63] Demi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Agron Demi, executive director of Gap Institute. Pristina, June 2016.

[64] Zhubi, D. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Driton Zhubi, executive director of NGO LENS. Pristina, June 2016.

[65] Demi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Agron Demi, executive director of Gap Institute. Pristina, June 2016.

Kosovo, the media and civil society have shown their power of influence whenever they could build a synergy of operations.

One of the most salient cases is the one from 2012 when the new Criminal Code of Kosovo was enacted, including three problematic provisions that could be abused by courts to suppress freedom of the media and compel journalists to reveal their sources under broadly defined circumstances.[66] For weeks media and civil society activists were putting pressure on policymakers to change or clarify the problematic provisions, yet, given the support the government had from the European Union Office and the United States Embassy in Pristina, the Code was formally adopted in the Parliament. With high stakes at play, the pressure of the media and CSOs became more organized, leading to eventual vetoing of the Code by the President of Kosovo, resignation of the Minister of Justice and adoption of a new Criminal Code without the problematic provisions.[67] This case of media and CSO synergy is worth a more detailed study, as it is for the first time that neither the media nor civil society organizations could use the international community's presence in Kosovo to put pressure on authorities, as they usually do. In other words, the battle over the Criminal Code was fought by media and CSOs without major support. Not only were the problematic provisions removed from the new Criminal Code, but the momentum was used to initiate a new law on protection of journalistic sources, which was adopted soon after, marking an important legal step toward implementing constitutional provisions on media freedoms.

Other salient cases where the media and CSOs have shown their power vis-à-vis policy makers include the Law on Amnesty, when they sided with the opposition to shape a controversial law that stemmed from Kosovo's dialogue with Serbia, public pressure against particular cabinet ministers, amendments of legislation on electronic wiretapping, as well as any policy directly related to the media or civil society.

Another case worth mentioning is also from 2012, the case of the Law on the Central Bank of Kosovo and Microfinance Institutions. With the new law, the government challenged the basic mechanism of Kosovo's civil society system, which guarantees that the wealth accumulated by not-for-profit organizations should remain within the civil society sector and cannot be divided as profit.[68] The new law would have allowed the Central Bank to

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[66] Gashi, K. (2013) Kosovo, in Freedom House, Nation in Transitm https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2013/kosovo

[67] Koha Ditore, Miratohet ne parim kodi penal pa nenet problematike [New Criminal Code, without problematic provisions, adopted in principle] 5 July 2012, http://koha.net/?id=8&arkiva=1&l=106033

[68] Gashi, K. (2013) Kosovo, in Freedom House, Nation in Transit https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2013/kosovo

turn microfinance NGOs into for-profit businesses, without stipulating what is to happen with their assets, including some 100 million euros they had accumulated from their operations.[69] In a synergized campaign, media and civil society organizations advocated with the Office of the Ombudsperson who addressed the issue to the Constitutional Court. In 2013, the Court ruled that the provisions of the law contested by the civil society were unconstitutional and that assets of NGOs could not be transferred to for-profit entities.

Beside these special occasions, Kosovo think tanks and advocacy groups work directly with the policy-makers and have a significant influence in and on the policy-making process. There are more and more organizations that are profiling themselves into different policy areas, where they have gathered knowledge and built expertise, areas in which they are really competent when influencing policies.[70] This influence, however, is marginalized on policy issues where political parties have a direct interest.[71] In its annual report, the European Commission has continuously criticized Kosovo authorities for not cooperating sufficiently with civil society. The cooperation is not inexistent but rather happens on an ad hoc basis. Some particular media, especially those that apply stronger standards and have better sustainability index, have similar influence on policies.

Kosovo's civil society and its media are very often engaged in ad hoc coalitions or consortiums for a particular policy cause. In such cases, their forces are synergized and the effect of their joint work is noticeable. As Astrit Gashi puts it, media and CSOs have a great influence on shaping the public opinion, yet, it remains unknown as to what extent the public is using that opinion when making decisions.[72] All the interviewees consulted for this research noted that there is quite some influence of the media and civil society in the society at large, but also expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of such influence, which could have been much greater.

It is worth mentioning that the influence of certain NGOs in the policy-making process in the central level has created the environment for many local NGOs to repeat their work at the level of local governments. Virtually in every municipality in Kosovo, there are NGOs that monitor, evaluate and/or work directly with local authorities.

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[69] *Ibid*

[70] Ejupi, B. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Burim Ejupi, executive director of INDEP and a civil society expert in Kosovo. Pristina, June 2016.

[71] Demi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Agron Demi, executive director of Gap Institute. Pristina, June 2016.

[72] Gashi, A. (2016) Author's interview with Mr. Astrit Gashi, chairman of the board of Blic online media and a frequent commentator on media, civil society and politics. Pristina, June 2016.

Conclusions

As we have shown, Kosovo has a vibrant public scene where media and civil society are influential. Both actors, media and civil society, see each other to be of crucial importance for their own activities. Thus, civil society reports and opinions are featured regularly in the media. Journalists have created a pattern of including civil society activists and leaders in most of the policy-related stories, in the role of independent analysts. The positions of civil society organizations are very often embraced by the media, creating a synergy of efforts and resulting in policy change.

The partnership between Kosovo media and civil society, however, remains informal. Due to the context in which the media operates in Kosovo, with fragile sustainability and questionable professional standards, journalists are mainly reporting on the civil society's work in a shallow manner, preferring to quote activists instead of digging through well-researched reports. On the other hand, the context in which the civil society operates, with no steady income and rather project-driven financing, leaves them understaffed and unprepared to disseminate their work through the media. Frictions between civil society and media exist, albeit to a less extent than those in the neighboring countries.

This overall setting leaves the cooperation between the two sectors in a rather ad-hoc basis. In spite of the ad-hoc nature, however, we have shown that on some crucial issues and very controversial policies, the synergy of actions by civil society and media has opened the way for them to assert their power in the policy-making process. Joint projects and activities between media and CSOs should be encouraged, as they could serve as a great step towards a more systematic cooperation between the two sectors.

MACEDONIA

Friends and enemies, polarization and conspiracies

Marina Tuneva

Short overview of media landscape

The media landscape in Macedonia is very diverse and there are numerous media outlets, both traditional and online. More specifically, there are: 5 national private television stations, 55 regional and local TV stations and 6 cable TV stations at the national level, 8 newspapers, 8 magazines and 76 radio stations at the national and local level, as well as hundreds of internet portals and internet televisions. Apart from these media, several cable television stations were established in recent years that produce programs in the Macedonian and Albanian language. We could say that, beside the public national broadcaster MRT, Macedonia has more than 200 media outlets that are privately owned[1].

Despite the large number of media outlets in the country, there is continuous criticism that the confrontation between the two main opponents within the Macedonian political block and the political domination of the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE has affected the entire media scene after 2011. One of the mechanisms for dominance over the media scene was state advertising, which caused dependence of private media on the state budget, thus opening the way for direct influence in newsrooms. Hence, public interest in the media is often replaced with individual interests of various political parties, or business centers. Media content is often detrimental to citizens because they are repeatedly subject of media manipulation and have difficulties accessing accurate and timely information from mainstream media. "The CSO sector, despite making progress over the last decades, still has a quite limited influence on public policies and consequently on the wider processes of good governance"[2].

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[1] Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, *Market analysis of audio and audiovisual media services for 2014* (2015) see: http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1154&Itemid=463&lang=mk, (accessed 11 May 2016)

[2] B. Petkovic, ed. *Media Integrity Matters – Reclaiming Public Service Values in Media and Journalism*, Peace Institute Ljubljana, 2015, p.262-265

Criticism for media content is contained in recent reports based on a monitoring of traditional media outlets, conducted by the state regulator, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS), and the monitoring by the Institute of Communication Studies within the project "Democracy Watch 2015: Political pluralism in the media before and during elections (MODEM)."[3] These reports point out to some of the mainstream traditional media as unprofessional and unethical in the coverage of certain topics in the first half of 2016. Reports identified tendencies of breaching the Code of Journalists and the Law in the programs of the public broadcaster, the Macedonian Radio Television (MRT) and in at least three national private TV stations.

In addition to this, reports by the international organizations that monitor the media situation in the country continuously rank the country at a very low level with regard to media freedoms. Thus, following the Index of Freedom of Expression by Reporters Without Borders[4], Macedonia is ranked 118th out of 180 countries in the world and in reports for 2016[5], Freedom House assessed that Macedonia is one of four countries in Europe considered non-free in terms of the media sector. The other three countries included in this report are Russia, Belarus and Turkey.

Due to all these problems that negatively affect the work of the media and their editorial policy, the media issue has become a political requirement that should be met through implementation of systemic reforms in the sector by Macedonia in its Euro-Atlantic integration process. Reforms in the media sector are part of the "Przino Agreement"[6].

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[3] Institute for Communication Studies, *Report from the Monitoring of the Media Content Through the Rapid Response Media Mechanism of the Institute of Communication Studies* (2016), see: http://respublica.edu.mk/modem/23-18-dekemvri-2015/First-Monthly-report-MODEM-28_12_15%20EN_PDF.pdf (accessed May 15 2016)

[4] Reporters without Borders, *2016 World Press Freedom Index* (2016) see: https://rsf.org/en/macedonia (accessed June 13 2016)

[5] Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2016*, see: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/macedonia (accessed May 18th 2016)

[6] The Przino agreement, or agreement from 2 June – 15 July, is a political agreement among the main political parties in the Republic of Macedonia with the mediation of the European Union. The agreement ended the Macedonian political and institutional crisis in the first half of 2015. It included: the participation of the opposition party SDSM in the ministries; the early resignation of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in January 2016 and a caretaker government to bring the country to general elections in June 2016, as well as a Special prosecutor to lead the investigations about the eventual crimes highlighted by the wiretapping scandal, see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news-files/20150619_agreement.pdf (Accessed 19 May 2016)

The state of civil society

The fundamentals for free operation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Macedonia are provided with the Constitution of the country and, more specifically, in the Law on Citizens' Associations and Foundations. This Law is one of the least amended laws in Macedonia, taking into consideration that the first Law on Citizens' Associations and Foundations dates back from July 1998 and amendments on this version of the Law were made 9 years after, i.e. in 2007. This Law was abrogated with the adoption of the "new" Law on Citizens' Associations and Foundations (LCAF) that the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia adopted on 16th of April 2010 – a version, that a year later, was amended again. Hence, there were only two laws in the last 18 years and both versions were amended once.

The current Law regulates: the manner, the conditions and procedures for establishing, registration and terminating of associations, foundations and organizational types of foreign organizations in the Republic of Macedonia, their available assets, supervising, statutory changes and the status of public benefit organizations. The provisions of this Law do not pertain to political parties, churches, religious communities and religious groups, trade unions, chambers and other forms of association regulated by separate laws[7].

Until the adoption of the "new" Law on Citizens' Associations and Foundations in 2010, the number of CSOs was 11,350. By March 2012, only 3,732 CSOs had re-registered in compliance with the obligations set out in the 2010 Law.[8]

In the last several years, the number of organizations has significantly increased - there were 11,457 associations and foundations registered by 2010. Pursuant to the new Law on Associations and Foundations adopted in 2010, organizations were required to register again; thus the number of re-registered organizations by March 2012 reached 3,732.

According to data published by the Central Registry of Macedonia (CRM), there are an increasing number of registered CSOs (associations and foundations). The registry enlists a total of 14,245 organizations in 2015, in comparison to 2014, when 13,656 CSOs were registered. Active organizations

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[7] International Center for Not-for-Profit-Law, *Law on Associations and Foundations* (2010) see: http://www.tacso.org/doc/mk0020.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2016)

[8] Government of Republic of Macedonia, *Strategy for Cooperation with the NGOs (2012-2017*), see: http://www.gov2gov.info/uploads/library/1450261274_strategy-for-cooperation-of-the-government-with-the-civil-society--282012-2017-29.pdf (Accessed May 10 2016) http://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=22&Itemid=37

are considered those that submitted audit reports or provided a financial statement. A total of 3,938 CSOs have completed this requirement[9].

Based on the Civil Society Index - CIVICUS (2011)[10], CSOs are described as "moderately developed" in terms of institutions and values. According to data published by the Financial Intelligence Unit concerning 11,350 CSOs, their budgets are very small and only 5 CSOs have an annual budget of more than 1.6 million EUR.

Sustainability continues to be a key challenge, and this is confirmed by the financial indicators pertaining to CSOs. Namely, most (65%) of CSOs submitted only a financial statement, which means that they had an annual budget below 2,500 EUR; furthermore, there is a small number of employees in CSOs and, last but not least, they are financially dependent on donations and grants.

The total expenditures of CSOs in Macedonia were 60,226,397 EUR.[11]

In addition to this description of the CSO status in Macedonia, there are significant findings identified in the Progress Report of the European Commission for Macedonia for 2015. Although the Report notes that some progress was made, CSOs continued to show serious concerns about the difficult climate in which they operate. Based on the CSO's reports, the EU progress report marked that they have been a subject to harsh criticism by politicians and pro-government media, and that there was limited Government commitment to a dialogue[12]. The 2015 Progress report also states that, during the political crisis in the country, CSOs often played a constructive role by organizing numerous peaceful protests across ethnic lines and demanded greater accountability by politicians. There is also a general remark that national authorities should involve CSOs in policy-making and in amendments of legislation in a more regular and effective manner.

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[9] Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, *A Report About the Positive Environment Enabling the Development of Civil Society in Macedonia* (2015), see: http://mcms.org.mk/images/docs/2016/izvestaj-za-ovozmozuvacka-okolina-na-go-vo-mk-2015.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2016)

[10] Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, *CIVICUS: Civil Society Index- Analytical Country Report on Macedonia* (2011) see: https://civicus.org/downloads/CSI/Macedonia.pdf (accessed 11 June 2016)

[11] European Centre for Not-For-Profit-Law, *A Report About the Positive Environment Enabling the Development of Civil Society in Macedonia* (2015), see: http://ecnl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/MM-Regional-Report-2014.pdf (Accessed 11 June 2016)

[12] European Commission, *Progress Report 2015* see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf (Accessed 2 June 2016)

In June 2016, a total of 89 CSOs issued a public response to the Government, in which they seek to stop the process for a selection of CSO representatives in the Council for Cooperation between the Government and civil society.[13] These CSOs demanded amendments of the Decision on establishment of the Council and consultative process with CSO representatives, with an objective to offer varied opinions of relevance to the Council's work. This joint public reaction followed the Decision of the Government to appoint majority members within the Council for Cooperation from the public institutions and as result of the objections for a lack of transparency in the process. These reactions undoubtedly prove the lack of mutual trust between national authorities and the civil society sector in the country.

Coverage of civil society in the media

In a period of two weeks, starting from June 13th until June 29th, coverage of the CSO sector in the country was monitored in the following four daily newspapers (in Macedonian language):

- Sloboden pecat
- Vest
- Vecer
- Utrinski vesnik

Within the same period, the following Internet portals were also analyzed:

- www.plusinfo.mk
- www.dnevnik.mk
- www.emagazin.mk

None of the covered stories/reports take a dominant place in the newspapers, with an exception of the cases where the CSO sector was involved in politically related events in the country, such as in the so-called "Colorful revolution"[14]. The CSO's involvement in the "revolution" is

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[13] The public reaction is published at the web page of the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), see: http://www.mcms.org.mk/en/news-and-publicity/news/1783-da-se-zapre-izborot-na-pretstavnici-vo-sovetot-za-sorabotka-na-vladata-so-gragjanskiot-sektor.html (Accessed 10 June 2016)

[14] This is the term used for the protest movement that draws on the country's diversity and extends across the political spectrum, uniting people of all stripes, ages, and colors to air their grievances against the government. These protests differ from the protests that erupted in February 2015 when the opposition released recordings allegedly made illegally by the government.

reaffirmed and supported in some of the dailies (e.g. *Sloboden pecat*), while it is heavily criticized in others, where the story is framed in a negative way (e.g. *Vecer* daily). There are similar tendencies noticed in Internet portals. While the activities related to the "Colorful revolution" are reported in a neutral manner in the portal Emagazin, they are either neutrally or positively covered in Plusinfo and ignored in Dnevnik.

A daily newspaper which mostly reported about the CSO sector is *Sloboden Pecat,*[15] the newest media outlet in the country compared with the others. Out of the five newspapers analyzed, *Sloboden pecat* has a total of 11 articles about the CSO sector in this period, compared to the others which vary between 4-6 articles.
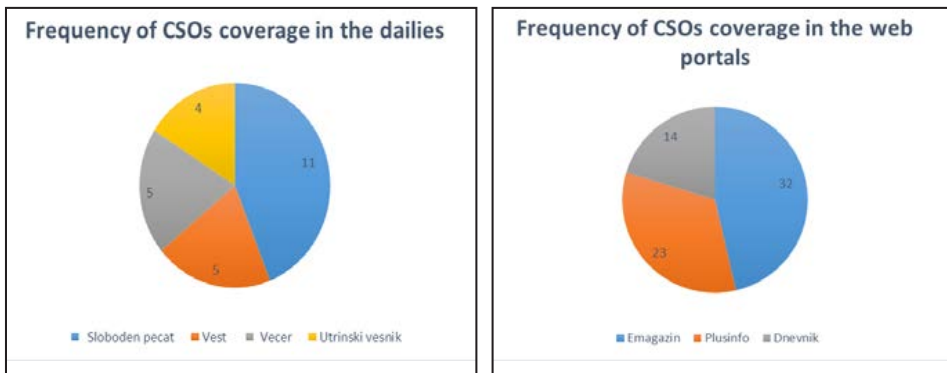
Out of the dailies analyzed, *Sloboden Pecat* is the one which covers the activities of the CSO sector in a neutral or positive manner, while *Vecer* and *Dnevnik*, which are considered dailies that are inclined toward the ruling party, mostly report about this sector in a negative manner. Quite often, the activities of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights are covered in this daily and it is an organization whose members actively take part in the Colorful revolution.

The only difference is that when this topic is on the agenda of the daily *Sloboden Pecat* (which is considered to lean toward the opposition) it is covered in an affirmative, i.e. positive way, while in *Vecer* it is only covered in a negative way as, for instance, with the following title *"How much money do foreigners pay to participants in the Colorful revolution"*[16].

Vest covers the activities of the CSO sector in a neutral manner, with short articles and its focus is on Roma CSOs, organizations that work with

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[15] The first edition of this daily appeared on October 19th, 2013 in Skopje.

[16] This article is published in daily Vecer on the 29th of June. It is a very long article, which puts the NGOs Sollidarnost and Lenka in the main focus, while making speculations about the sources of financing, the motives for the involvement of these NGOs in the "revolution", etc.

people with disabilities, as well as CSOs working with children. USAID and UNDP supported projects are briefly presented in some of its articles. While the tone of coverage is neutral, there is an absence of the voice of a representative from the CSOs covered in the article. Most of the articles are covered in the middle of the newspaper in places which are not so dominant on the page.

The activities of CSOs working on issues related to the LGBT community in the country are covered twice in *Sloboden Pecat*, once in an affirmative way, by raising the question about homophobia in the society and once in a neutral way. In *Dnevnik* this issue is covered once, framed in a negative context, i.e. that *"USAID spends money to support the LGBT community in Macedonia while a massacre happened in the US (in Orlando)"*[17].

Utrinski vesnik covers the activities of the CSO sector less frequently. The four articles referring to the CSO sector begin to appear from the 22nd of June and all of them are neutral. One of the articles is at a dominant place in the daily, i.e. on the second page, and extensively covers findings of a research by a CSO related to a public opinion poll about the resolution of the name dispute with Greece. The dominance of this story in the introductory pages of the daily once again confirms the practice that an important space is allocated for CSO stories that deal with topics that deal with political issues in the country.

Taking into consideration that June was a month for organizing pride parades at a global level, the LGBT community, and organizations that address the issues that this community faces were extensively covered in some of the media outlets. For example, this was the case with the coverage of the informative portal Emagazin, where a total of 10 articles referred to this topic. This internet portal also extensively covers the work of the CSO sector in general, with a frequency of 3-4 articles daily. It also has a separate section *"Good neighbors' relations"* where the activities of the CSO sector are extensively covered. The tone of reporting is always neutral.

In general, the activities and statements of the CSOs to the public are covered through press releases and press-conferences or similar events. There are rarely cases when a direct voice is given to a CSO representative in the articles. More often than not, the media does not cover the CSO sector in great detail and information is unattractive for the wider audience. There is no background provided either on the profile of the CSO or the history of its work.

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[17] This is the title of the article in daily Dnevnik, 15.06.2016, pages 2-3

What civil society thinks about media?

Five senior experts in the field of CSOs and media development were interviewed for the purposes of this research paper. More specifically, they are leaders of well-known, credible CSOs/consultancy organizations in Macedonia that, amongst other, work on assessments of the status of the civil and media sector and have a variety of advocacy actions that are aimed at improving the relations between the CSOs and the media outlets.

There are divided opinions in relation to the question about the **image that the civil society has in the media**. It appears that CSOs often do not understand the role of the media and, conversely, media often perceive CSOs as *"money laundering machines"*. Yet, CSOs consider media as influential in creating public perception about policies of the civil sector, but often there is not much interest among the media about the CSO's topics and there is even misinterpretation about the issues presented by the CSOs. Besides, there is another issue. The Code of Journalists[18] is quite often breached and, as one of the interviewees says, *"the media does not inform about the event; instead it just covers a quote from a 'foreigner' presenting the event from his/ her perspective; and they also do not identify the source of information in the investigative analysis".* In addition, the same news is copied in many media outlets, to the extent that identical grammar errors are made.

The interviewees note that polarization is another issue that is obvious in the way media report on CSO topics, which also affects the coverage of the CSO's news/events. In addition, CSOs perceive that media mainly focuses on daily political issues and media coverage of other issues of importance to the CSOs is insufficient. On the other hand, many of the media are seen as being controlled by the political elites. Critical CSOs are often ignored by the mainstream media and, in this regard, an organization which is often negatively depicted in the media is the Foundation Open Society Macedonia and this is also a case with other affiliated CSOs. As explained by one of the interviewed persons, "*the term 'SOROSIODS' is frequently used in the last two years of the political crisis in the country. It was created in early 2000's during the open attack of the right centered political parties towards the local SOROS Foundation (Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia -FOSIM) after the decision of this organization to organize a campaign in support of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), a peace accord signed by Macedonian and Albanian politicians that ceased the armed conflict in the country in 2001*".

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[18] Association of Journalists of Macedonia, *Code of Journalists* (2001), see: http://znm.org. mk/?page_id=1412&lang=en (Accessed on 14 May 2016)

In regard to the question whether **media are perceived as a friend or an enemy**, many considered media an enemy rather than a friend. However, as one of the experts emphasized, "*if private links between CSOs and media or journalists exist, they can be cooperative partners*". Still, there are not many examples of cooperation between media and CSOs. With some rare exceptions, media are indifferent towards CSOs and their activities. In addition, as assessed by the experts interviewed, mainstream media allow themselves to be used as a tool by political elites to make pressure and criticize some CSOs. "*CSOs usually claim they are interested in cooperation, however the majority of them often do not succeed to attract sufficient media attention*", one of the interviewed experts said. However, there is another issue in this regard and it is related to the fact that both CSOs and media contribute to their weak mutual interest. CSOs often lack capacities to "package" their issues, achievements and results in a user friendly and "digestible" format that can be easily covered in the media. Press releases sent by some CSOs are rather descriptive reports of their activities, instead of simple stories that can be understood by the wider audience.

On the other hand, some of the interviewees think that the media is always a friend, even when their views are completely opposite. In addition, our findings from interviews indicate that independent media clearly understand the role of civil society and, in many cases they support CSO's work. "*Media influenced by the regime*", in the opinion of an interviewee, "*are often considered enemies*".

CSOs are committed to attracting media attention with lots of activities, thus perceiving them as an ally in their public relations efforts. However, CSOs often overburden media with lots of requirements for their participation at events, which means that they lack a proper judgment of the best opportunities or methods/tools/tactics to attract their attention.

Another conclusion is that CSOs increasingly become aware that they need to use media as a main tool in their work, and this especially refers to those CSOs that are involved in advocacy activities and are committed to influencing policy creation, good governance, the fight against corruption, monitoring of social services, etc. "*As a result of this awareness, CSOs pay more attention to the communication component and show interest in building their PR capacities*". Consequently, one of the experts recommends that "*quite often project proposals of CSOs contain communication with media as a MUST!*" On the other hand, there are many CSOs that can be seen on TV and in other media, their activities are promoted free of charge. CSO's activities are often considered a great source to fill the programming needs of the media.

With regard to the extent to which media use analyses and evidence by CSOs, a general assessment of all interviewed experts is that this depends

on the particular interests of the media. On the other hand, even if media use information from CSOs, they often omit referencing the source of the information. However, there are some improvements in this regard. In the words of one of the experts, "*it seems that CSOs offer more analyses lately with better quality, and they cover issues of high interest in the public*".

Interviewees were also asked about the influence and impact of media and civil society in decision-making and the extent to which they serve as platforms for promoting public participation in decision-making at all levels of governance. The general view is that the influence and impact are limited. This is explained with the fact that there are many situations of a collision between the interests of the political parties with those of CSOs. "*CSOs and media are on different sides in this regard; CSOs' findings can be used, while media can be misused to cover manipulative content in the interests of centers of power*", emphasized one of the interviewees. Another challenge is that CSOs often have to pay for the publication of their content in order to present relevant results or policy positions. This is particularly the case because media are not always interested in supporting CSO's in the promotion of their policies and in the decision-making processes. Still, there are some opinions that CSOs are indeed more influential lately, especially in relation to the political crisis, rather than the media themselves. However, it is considered that the impact, both of CSOs and media, is quite limited and in this regard, there are opinions that CSO's reports and arguments often are not taken into consideration by national authorities.

Representing public or politics?

National laws stipulate the existence of several multi-stakeholder bodies comprised of representatives of public institutions, the civil society sector and other relevant institutions. In addition, there are also member-based CSOs with multi - sectorial governance structure (e.g. Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia).

Council of the media regulator[19] – Agency for Media and Audio Visual Media Services. This is a multi - sectorial body, consisting of 7 members, out of whom 3 are CSOs, 1 representative from an educational institution, 1 from a chamber and 2 members from the Parliament. Based on the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia appoints 7 members in the Council that are proposals from the following authorized nominators: the Majority Journalists' Association of Macedonia

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[19] Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, http://avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55&Itemid=34&lang=en

nominates one Council member; the Interuniversity Conference nominates one Council member; The Bar Association of the Republic of Macedonia nominates one Council member; the Trade Unions Association nominates one Council member; the Committee for Elections and Appointments of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia nominates two Council members; and the Association of the Local Self-government Units in the Republic of Macedonia nominates two Council members.

Programming Council of the public broadcaster (PBS), Macedonian Radio Television (MRT)[20] – This is also a multi-sectorial body, consisting of 13 members, out of whom 5 are CSOs, 1 from an educational institution, 2 from art institutions (Turkish and Albanian theater) and 5 from the Parliament. Based on the Law, the Parliament appoints 13 members that are proposed from the following authorized nominations: the Inter-University Conference nominates one member-candidate; the Albanian Theatre nominates one member-candidate; the Turkish Theatre nominates one member-candidate; the Majority Journalists' Associations nominates two member-candidates; the Association of the Local Self-government Units nominates three member-candidates; the Committee for Elections and Appointments of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia nominates five member-candidates.

One of the organizations that nominate two members (in the Council of the AVMU) and three members (in the Council of the MRT) is the Association of the Local Self-government Units in the Republic of Macedonia (ZELS). Both councils of the regulator and the organization are member based, whereas all the municipalities are the constituencies. It may be noted that, even though this organization is formally registered as a CSO, its members are part of the main political parties in the country and they represent political party interests, which does not necessarily mean that they represent the public or civil interests in general.

National European Integration Council[21] - The Council has 17 members: four members from the opposition and the ruling party respectively, and ex officio members: the chairperson of the European Affairs Committee, chairperson of the Foreign Policy Committee and Co-chairperson of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Republic of Macedonia and the EU.

Members of the National Council are: the Vice-President of the Government in charge of European affairs and one representative from the Cabinet of the President of the Republic of Macedonia, from the Cabinet of the

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[20] Macedonian Radio Television, *Annual Report of the work of the Macedonian Radio Television (MRT)*, see: http://goo.gl/3VQAuq (Accessed on 12 May 201)
[21] National European Integration Council, http://www.sobranie.mk/national-european-integration-council-621c4a67-3b5f-49ca-b84f-9345dcc9b589.nspx

President of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts, the Association of the Local Self-Government Units and the Journalists Association of the Republic of Macedonia respectively. These members participate in the work of the Council, without a right to vote.

There is a significant difference in the nominators of the National Council of Euro Integration and the other similar bodies since in this case, political parties directly nominate members together with the religious communities.

It may be noted that in the councils of the media regulator and the public broadcaster there are institutionally established linkages between the CSOs and the media. As stipulated in the Law, the nominators are the "Majority Journalists' Associations" or, as defined with the new media law, those are the journalistic associations (Association of Journalists and the Macedonian Association of Journalists). However, the 2015 European Commission Progress Report for Macedonia emphasized that: *"representation of journalists is divided between two associations, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and the Macedonian Association of Journalists (MAN). Here too, polarization occurs along political lines, with the recently reactivated MAN tending towards pro-government stances on most issues. The older of the organizations, the AJM, has continued to draw attention to a number of important issues such as the impact of government advertising on the diversity of the media and the role of the media during the political crisis"[22].*

Other organizations which are part of the CSO sector and where their councils, commissions and boards consist of different stakeholders from the media and the public include the **Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM)[23],** the sole independent media self- regulatory body in Macedonia. The structure of the Managing Board of the CMEM is a mix of journalists and media owners: four of the Board members are nominated by representatives of the media owners and three from the journalists proposed by the Association of Journalists of Macedonia. The Press Complaints Committee has a similar structure, i.e. it is composed of seven members, out of whom two are representatives of the media owners, two are representatives of journalists proposed by the Association of Journalists, and three are representatives of public life.

Regarding the independence of these bodies, some of the findings from national and international reports state that there is a lack of financial dependence, lack of transparency in their work and interference by political

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[22] European Commission, *2015 Progress Report,* see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf (Accessed 11 May 2016)

parties into their work. As stated in these reports, the PBS is biased towards the ruling parties, while the Agency of Media is inclined towards the private media outlets which are also biased in favor of the government. The 2015 EC Progress Report stated that: *"The largest television outlets with concessions to broadcast nationally (SITEL, KANAL5, ALFA and MRT, the public broadcaster) favor the Government and report selectively on opposition or civil society activities."[24]*

Bridges and walls

There are several mainstream journalism and media organizations that are quite often present in the public sphere with a critical stance on the main challenges that affect the sector. Their findings and analyses are frequently quoted in different reports that assess the media situation and the media sector in general, such as in the reports of the European Commission, United Nations, OSCE, Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, the International Federation of Journalists, etc.

Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM)[25] was founded in 1946. AJM is an independent, non-governmental and non- political party organization, whose purpose is to be the protector and promoter of professional standards and freedom of expression. AJM is a member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ).

Independent Trade Union of Journalists (ITUJ)[26] – is a union-based organization founded in 2010, in compliance with the Labor Rights Law. This organization protects the social rights of journalists. The Union is also a member of IFJ and EFJ.

Council of Media Ethics (CMEM)[27] - is a non-governmental, non-political and non-profit organization founded in 2013 and it is a media self - regulatory body that protects the Ethical Code of journalists and promotes professional standards in the media. CMEM is a member of the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe (AIPCE) and the regional network of press councils MediaNethics.

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[23] Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia, see: http://semm.mk/en/council-on-ethics/who-we-are

[24] European Commission, 2015 Progress Report, see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf (Accessed 11 May 2016)

[25] Association of Journalists of Macedonia, http://znm.org.mk/?lang=en

[26] Independent Trade Union of Journalists, http://ssnm.org.mk/za-ssnm/

[27] Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia, www.semm.mk

Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM)[28] - is a non-governmental, non-political and non-profit organization founded by the Danish School of Journalism, USAID/IREX Pro Media and the Macedonian Press Centre in 2001. The Institute is a founder of the high education institution the School of Journalism and Public Relations. MIM is a member of numerous networks whose mission is aimed at strengthening the professional standards and ethics of journalists in the region and worldwide.

The above-mentioned organizations have been publicly vocal in their critical observations of the media situation and the unfavorable environment of journalists and media workers in Macedonia. These organizations have been functional also as a non-formal platform, especially regarding legal reforms in the media sector. They frequently organize different public events on relevant topics in the area of professional and ethical reporting, promotion of media self - regulation, social rights and status of journalists, as well as a variety of trainings accessible to journalists from all media outlets at the national level. In addition, there are some incentives for journalists, such as annual awards organized by AJM and MIM that stimulate professional and investigative reporting. On the other hand, different multilingual guidelines are developed and published to support the work of journalists and media workers.

Other organizations that have been active in the sector in recent years are the Media Development Center (MDC)[29], the Center for Civic Cooperation (CCC)[30], NVOInfocentar[31], Metamorphosis[32], Transparency International Macedonia (TIM)[33] and others. These organizations are not member-based as the ones mentioned above and they predominantly act as think - thank organizations that frequently publish different types of assessments and organize trainings for civil activists and journalists. Another civil society organization that is active in the media sector is Civil - Center for Freedom.[34]

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[28] Macedonian Institute for Media, http://mim.org.mk/index.php/en/about-mim1

[29] Media Development Center, http://mdc.org.mk/en/

[30] Center for Civic Cooperation, http://ccc.org.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98&Itemid=80&lang=en

[31] NGO Info Center, http://nvoinfocentar.mk/en/

[32] Metamorphosis, http://metamorphosis.org.mk/en/about/

[33] Transparency International Macedonia http://www.transparency.mk/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=26

[34] Civil, http://civil.org.mk/profile-of-civil/

Media, civil society, and public participation

There have been a significant number of initiatives aimed at linking the CSO sector, media and the public in general, to influence the decision-making process and to amend legislation. Regardless of the level of their efficiency in reaching the ultimate objectives, it is worthwhile to briefly describe some of those in the context of our analysis.

One of the recent initiatives is the ***joint submission of a draft law for amending the current Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services*** by a non-formal platform composed of representatives of the media civil sector[35]. The initiative, among others, refers to changes of this law with regard to state advertising for the media, political and financial independence of the state regulator and the public broadcaster etc.

As far as the media reforms in the society are concerned there has been a ***process of consultations among CSOs, the media community and political partners headed by a mediator appointed by the EU Delegation in Skopje***. This process has been taking place for several months in the course of 2015 and 2016, during which the media community was provided an opportunity to exchange views on the media reforms, implementation of the Przino Agreement and the Urgent Reform Priorities set forth by the European Commission in June 2015[36]. This was a good model for the inclusion of different actors in consultation processes addressing legislation and the entire environment in which CSOs and media operate.

The Institute for Communication Studies, through its ***platform for digital citizenship Res Publica[37], allows comprehensive professional discussion to improve media and communication policies and standards, strengthen the role of the academic and professional community in public policies and provide strategic participation of civil society in protecting the public interest in Macedonia***. The main purpose of Res Publica is to empower citizens, journalists, experts and members of other communities to participate and debate on matters of public interest, creating a professional network that will analyze these issues. Its associates are professionals who are experts in their fields or policy makers and, in this way, the public is encouraged to form opinions and make decisions in an informed manner.

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[35] See the press statement at http://znm.org.mk/?p=1861&lang=en (Accessed on 15 June 2016)

[36] Urgent Reform Priorities for the Republic of Macedonia, see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_urgent_reform_priorities.pdf (Accessed 12 June 2016)

[37] Res Public digital platform, http://respublica.edu.mk/

The Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia initiated the ***establishment of a non-formal working group to address the use of hate speech in the media***. The network is to be composed of representatives from the civil society sector, media organizations, journalists and editors and representatives of state institutions. This is considered of particular importance in dealing with hate speech, as there has been wider criticism about the inefficiency to tackle this problem. On the other hand, the Council of Media Ethics also made an effort to ***link citizens, media and the public in general, through the adoption of a Charter on Ethical Reporting During Elections***[38]. Taking into consideration that the country is ahead of early parliamentary elections, an immediate need has been identified for a more direct involvement of the public in monitoring media work and for the observance of professional standards in journalistic work. This initiative also came in parallel to the discussions about reforms in the media, particularly in relation to their professional work. It was supplemented with a research on perceptions of citizens and journalists about the topic of self-regulation in the media, as well as on the most immediate problems to be addressed in the area of media work.

The importance of civic participation through social media and networks has become visible and effectuated through the wider mobilization of students in the protests against the recent elections of the management of the Student parliament, a body that stands for students rights at the State University "Saint Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje. This has been also a case in the past when students mobilized themselves in protests against reforms in the higher education system.

Conclusions

The research showed that CSOs invest a lot of effort into communication with the media and the public; however, more emphasis could be given to interactive aspects of that communication.

1. CSOs in Macedonia are moderately developed in terms of institutions and values and their sustainability continues to be a challenge;
2. The environment in which CSOs operate, especially those that criticize the work of national authorities, is unfavorable and they are often the subject of negligence or ignorance and criticism by mainstream media that tend to favor the Government;

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[38] Charter on Ethical Reporting During Elections, see: http://semm.mk/en/news/2015-08-11-15-03-18/204-2016-01-27-13-41-21 (Accessed 15 June 2016)

3. None of the news stories about the CSO sector takes a dominant place in the analyzed media outlets;

4. Generally, there is low level of coverage of CSOs' activities in the media and coverage is limited to some CSOs, particularly those that take part in activities linked to changes in the politics in the country;

5. While there are media outlets that cover the activities of the CSO sector in a neutral fashion, there are other media outlets that portray the activities of this sector in a negative way, particularly if this stems from the political affiliation of the media outlet;

6. There have been wider perceptions that the media and the CSO sector do not understand each other's role sufficiently, hence there is a need for additional education on both sides;

7. Polarization among CSOs also reflects the portrayal of the CSO sector in the media;

8. There are initiatives aimed at establishing linkages between the CSO sector and the media in achieving changes in legislation and in the decision - making process, as recommended in different international repots; However, there haven't been any outstanding achievements due to the lack of systematic and strategic connection with the institutions and the political actors to this objective; and

9. Due to the polarization of the media, there is biased selection of news, which creates unfair access of the public to different topics of relevance for their informed choices. This also affects the CSOs that cannot equally promote their actions publicly. However, social media and the civil society media "compensate" this gap and contribute to the distribution of news among different audiences.

MONTENEGRO

Between public interest and political divisions

Daniela Brkić

Short overview of media landscape

Liberal entry to the media market and, generally to the journalistic profession, introduced in the early 2000s, brought a pluralism of views to a young democratic media scene in Montenegro. Currently, there are six television channels with national coverage, and a dozen local, 54 radio stations, four national dailies, one political weekly, and several local editions of Serbian daily papers and tabloids that cover a population of less than 650,000. However, failure to introduce a functional mechanism of safeguarding the professional standards and fair competitive environment left these freedoms open to abuses.

Insufficient transparency about media ownership[1], poor implementation of antimonopoly measures, and weak rules on media concentration have led to the creation of media clusters that deeply polarise the media scene in the country. Organised around a single editorial policy, sided either with or against the ruling party, such media clusters are used by political power centres for the propagation of their agendas and to smear their opponents, often disregarding professional standards and neglecting the public interest.

Many media outlets are not financially sustainable and this has a negative impact on the quality of reporting and professionalism. Some major private media outlets are at risk of failure due to high tax debts. On the other hand, there are concerns about transparency and non-discrimination in state advertising. According to Montenegro's media trade union, journalists are poorly paid and their jobs are not secure. In the past three years, at least 500 journalists lost their jobs, while three TV stations and one newspaper closed due to poor financial performance.

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[1] D. Brkić, "Media ownership and financing in Montenegro", in B. Petković (ed.) *Media Integrity Reports*, Peace Institute, Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies, Ljubljana, 2015, http://mediaobservatory.net/sites/default/files/Media%20Ownership%20and%20Finances%20in%20Montenegro.pdf (accessed 23 May 2016).

Economic pressures put journalists at risk of editorial interference and self-censorship.

The problems proved persistent for many years. In assessing freedom of expression in 2015[2], the European Commission noted that no progress was made in the past year. The main concerns remain the unresolved cases of attacks on journalists and media property, including the 2004 murder case of editor-in-chief of daily Dan, the independence of the public service broadcaster RTCG, and proper implementation of European Court of Human Rights case law in lawsuits against the media.

In 2016, dialogue on improving ethical standards in reporting, facilitated by the OSCE, led to a revised Code of Ethics for journalists, but self-regulation mechanisms, re-established in 2012, so far proved insufficient due to the fact that they are split in different forms, reflecting divisions within the media community.

Montenegro keeps a poor score with other international media watchdog organisations also. In Reporters without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2016[3], Montenegro climbed eight places to 106th position, which still places it among the worst in southeast Europe, outpacing only Bulgaria (113th) and Macedonia (118th). The report states that the Montenegrin media are subject to political and economic pressure as reporters investigating government corruption are often accused of trying to harm the nation. "Journalists have to censor themselves because they are often the targets of violent verbal and physical attacks and those responsible enjoy virtually systematic impunity," the report noted.

Freedom House, in its annual Freedom in the World report[4], granted Montenegro the unenviable "downward trend arrow" for 2016. Montenegro's civil liberties rating declined from 2 to 3, its status declined from Free to Partly Free. Montenegro enjoys the same status also when it comes to freedom of the press. Some of the serious problems, according to the report, include attacks on independent media, including vandalizing vehicles; public threats to editors expressed on social media; and the arrest of a journalist during protests in 2015.

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[2] European Commission, *Montenegro 2015 Report*, Brussels, p. 19.
[3] Reporters Without Borders, *World Press Freedom Index 2016*, https://rsf.org/en/ranking (accessed 28 June 2016)
[4] Freedom house, *Freedom in the World 2016*, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press-2016/table-country-scores-fotp-2016 (accessed 28 June 2016)

Civil society landscape

There are 3,940 non-governmental organizations (NGO) registered in Montenegro, but estimations say that only one fourth of them are active. The estimation is based on the fact that in 2013, only 1050 NGOs filed their financial statements to the Tax Administration, which is an indicator that they have actually conducted some activities.

The largest number of registered organizations, according to the Register of non-governmental organizations kept by the Ministry of Interior, work in the areas of culture (656), protection of human and minority rights (267), art (240), institutional and non-institutional education (233), agriculture and rural development (221), social and health protection (239), development of civil society and volunteerism (267) and environmental protection (254).

According to data[5] from the EU-funded Montenegro office for technical Assistance for CSOs, Montenegrin NGOs are mostly small, poorly equipped, municipal organizations, dedicated to solving problems directly in the local community. However, at the national level, there is a core of established, organisationally mature NGOs engaged mainly in advocacy, research, monitoring and capacity building in areas such as the fight against corruption, public administration, poverty reduction and human rights. Their presence in public life is very strong, and their actions yield significant results in influencing public decisions, processing corruption and legislation amendments.

Research shows that public support for NGOs and their activities is relatively high and stable.

According to a survey[6] conducted in February 2016 by Ipsos Strategic Marketing, for the purpose of the Centre for Development of NGO (CRNVO), public trust in NGOs is on the stable level of 47% if compared to a similar 2012 survey. Also, around one half of citizens believe that the NGO sector as a whole operates with the aim of improving life in Montenegro. However, the trend is declining when it comes to its effectiveness. Only 37% of citizens believe that NGOs are an important factor when it comes to controlling and limiting governing structures. In 2012, this percentage stood at 49%.

Limiting factors to the functioning of the CSO sector, as recognised in EC's 2015 Report on Montenegro, are the lack of a sustainable system of public funding for CSOs and an appropriate institutional framework. The current system of public funding has so far proven inefficient, a fact acknowledged

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5   Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organizations, Montenegro Office, *Needs assesment report*, May 2016
6   Ibid

by the State Audit Institution. Moreover, the Law on Gaming, currently the only source of public financing for CSOs, is not being implemented properly and the amount allocated to CSOs' projects is decreasing.

Relations between CSOs and the government have occasionally been overly adversarial and characterised by distrust, especially on matters of the rule of law and fundamental rights. Instances of government bodies undertaking unlawful surveillance of CSOs and using administrative intimidation and legal threats have been reported and proven with court verdicts. EC also states that it is a matter of concern that some civil society activists have been repeatedly targeted on a personal basis by local media through smear campaigns.

Despite all the detriments, Freedom Houses reports in nations in transit, as a rule, give the civil society sector the best scores within the measured parameters, and considerably higher than those related to the independence of media.

Coverage of civil society in the media

The monitoring of three main newspapers (Dan, Vijesti, Pobjeda) and three main websites (Vijesti.me, CDM.me, Portalanalitika.me) during the period 4-18 May 2016, showed that civil society is considerably present in media coverage. The total number of articles amounted to 235 and they covered 122 different topics. On average, each of the monitored media had 2.8 articles involving CSOs on a daily basis. In terms of quantity, most of the media had on average 2.2 articles related to CSO activities, with the exception of daily Dan whose daily average amounted to 5.7 articles.

The precence of CSOs in media coverage, besides quantitative, had notable visibility, considering that articles involving CSO were mentioned 14 times in cover pages of the three dailies. Only two of those were consequences of CSOs planned activities, i.e presentation of a poll on public trust in judiciary, while the rest of them are products of media efforts in which they sought partnership with CSOs. These instances, however, for the major part can be asigned to only one media – daily Dan, which made 9 cover stories with CSOs as main sources of information. The stories that made the cover pages refered mainly to corruption and abuse of power. However, only half of them had CSO activities as the main focus of the article, while the rest of the selected coverage used CSO representatives as secondary sources.

The rest of the media coverage, although prolific in quantity, proved to be of rather meagre quality. 44% of all articles were adapted press releases issued by CSO, and another 27% were hort news stories based on one source, usually the very CSO whose activity or statement was reported on.

TEXT GENRE
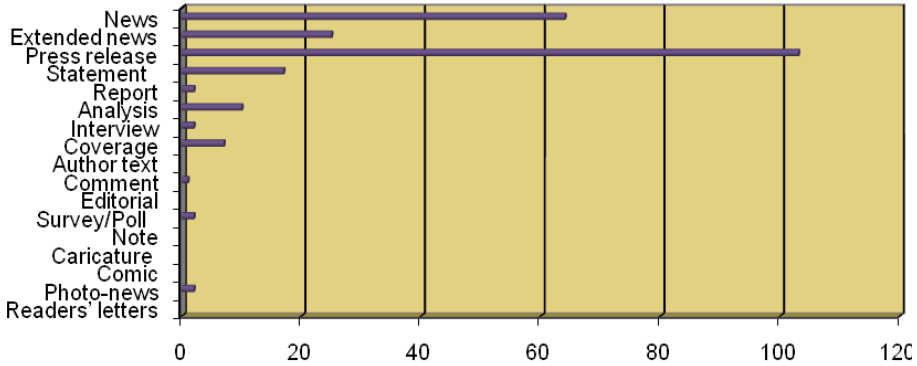
While the dominant journalistic genres in reporting CSO, beside press releases, were news, extended news and statements, sourcing was also limited to just one source (68%), and only 12% of all monitored articled had three or more sources of information.

CSOs' activities are mainly reported on the basis of press conferences, or on the basis of their press releases, statements and reports (59%). Other occasions for the articles include staged events such as sessions, meetings or encounters (21%), and another 12% are announcements of CSOs' activities. Only 6% of the articles referred to an up-to-date real event.

REPRESENTED SOURCES
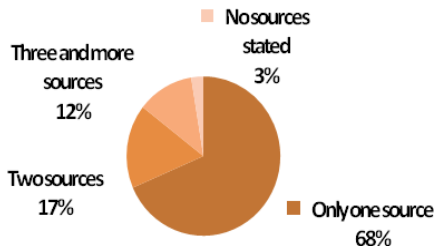
OCCASION FOR THE ARTICLE
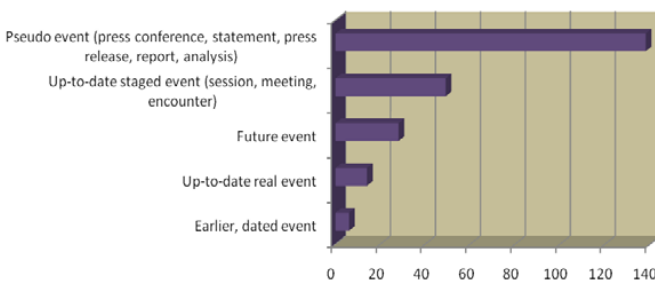
Considering the above data, media coverage of CSOs displays a significant dosage of pasiveness, while on the other hand communication practices of CSOs prove very proactive.

If the overall media content related to CSOs is analysed based on the primary source of information reported and the communication initiative, the results show that 69% of articles were initiated by CSO representatives, 19% by journalist/media, 5% by the government institutions, 4% by politicians and, only a very small amount, by ordinary citizens and international organizations.

The disbalance might be a consequence of the unfavourable situation in the media sector where financially burdened, low-staffed outlets choose easier ways to produce content, and, on the other hand, efficent visibility practices of a growing CSO sector. However, if the two are to work toward the same goal, then this or any other disbalance is detrimental to the relation of partnership among the two sectors.

When it comes to the content of the articles published in the selected period, they provide a quite diversified array of topics, ranging from environmental protection, to culture, human rights and politics.

| CONTENT OF THE JOURNALISTIC TEXT	
Environment protection	14%
Culture and art	13%
National identity/ideology/politics	13%
Functionality of state institutions	12%
Children, youth and family	10%
LGBT rights	9%
Rights of persons with disabilities	7%
Humanitarian actions	7%
Corruption/financial abuses	5%

Other topics, represented only in minor measure, include women's rights, animals' rights, minority rights, social welfare and media freedoms.

The nature of the content is for the major part negative (41%), but the media generally take a neutral attitude toward the reported content.

CONTENT (%)		
Positive	Neutral	Negative
29	30	41
ATTITUDE TOWARD CONTENT (%)		
Positive	Neutral	Negative
7	92	1

The dominant negative nature of content most often is a consequence of opposing attitudes of CSOs and the state authorities, irrespective of the social area. Further content analysis shows that media reports in 48% of the cases presented CSOs as one conflicting side, while only 19% of the articles promoted partnerships of CSOs. According to media coverage, CSOs most often entered partnerships with public institutions (33%), mainly in the area of education and culture, as well as local administration, and other CSOs(19%), while the main target of CSOs criticism was the government (54%), public institutions (15%), but also other CSOs(10%).

Contextual relations
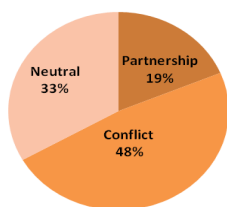
CONTEXTUAL RELATIONS OF CSOs		
	WITH	VERSUS
Public service institutions	33 %	15 %
Local administration	20 %	9 %
Government	9 %	54 %
Politicians	0 %	4 %
Parliament	0 %	4 %
International organizations/Embassies	6 %	0 %
Companies	13 %	0 %
Church	0 %	4 %
Other CSO	19 %	10 %

In recent years, some prominent civil society activists have been the target of smear campaigns, mostly by one tabloid newspaper, but the monitored period also provided proof of negative sterotyping of NGOs. For example, one of the leaders of the major opposition force Democratic front, Nebojša Medjević, commenting[7] on this party's act in the parliament in which their representatives chanted "Milo, thief" toward Prime Minister Milo Đukanović, causing verbal and almost physical incident among the MPs. "Chanting "Milo, thief!" exposed the entire network of agents of banking fascism, especially in the so-called free media (and even in some, until recently, opposition media)

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[7] *Medojević*: *Skandiranje "Milo lopove" razotkrilo mrežu agenata bankarskog fašizma,* Portal analitika, 16 May 2016, *http://portalanalitika.me/clanak/229474/medojevic-skandiranje-milo-lopove-razotkrilo-mrezu-agenata-bankarskog-fasizma (accessed on 8 June 2016)*

and the so-called NGO sector, which for a large part represent the interests of global fascists against the interests of their people and their country", said the statement.

Similar statements, which place NGOs either as associates or opponents of the government structures and the ruling party, can often be found in the media, especially in user generated comments on internet portals, and occasionally they came from high state officials. Such a practice contributes to the politicization of CSOs, and, especially, when combined with evident tensions among different CSOs, it can lead to further polarization of the sector, which jeopardizes its main goal. A similar situation has been proven to be detrimental to the Montenegrin media scene, where political polarisation lowered professional standards.

Opinion of civil society on media

According to research by TASCO/IPSSOS[8] from April 2016, almost half of CSOs consider their visibility to be at the appropriate level. However those who believe that the visibility of CSOs is at a low level, tend to blame it on the media rather than themselves.

Similar to TASCO's research, the one conducted among citizens showed that 44% of citizens find that media sufficiently report on the activities of non-governmental organizations, while 31% of citizens believe that the media inadequately report on the activities of NGOs.

Some of the most prominent representatives of the civil sector in Montenegro agree that media reporting can be generally qualified as superficial, sometimes editorially biased, and in extreme cases malicious.

"Most often the main goal of journalist is to tick the box for another written article which would secure him a salary at the end of the month. Another problem is that the ordinary journalist, even when he/she sees a problem and wishes to report on it, the final outcome and its realization depends on the will and interpretation of the editor", says Boris Raonić[9], President of the Civic Alliance, a human rights organisation.

"Superficiality can be attributed to almost all media in Montenegro, but that can be attributed to the lack of knowledge on the functioning of the civil sector rather than to the conscious intention to marginalize the civil

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8 Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organizations, Montenegro Office, *Needs assesment report*, May 2016
9 Interview with President of the Civic Alliance, Boris Raonić, Podgorica, 22 June 2016.

sector", says Dejan Milovac, Deputy Executive Director of the Network for the Affirmation of NGO Sector – MANS, anticorruption CSO[10].

Another shared experience by some CSO representatives is seeing their studies and research data, and even statements interpreted in three different ways by three different dailies. They complain of selective use of data, and refocusing of the main points of documents provided by CSO's.

Dragoljub Duško Vuković, long-time journalist and later media analyst, who also spent years working in or for media-related NGOs, explains[11] that media interpretation of CSOs analysis and reports vary from one outlet to another.

"There are media that use CSOs' reports in a correct manner and contextualize the presented data in a fair manner, but there are also media which use these data selectively and in a way that suits them to justify their predefined thesis or established approach to specific topics, be it politics or something else. This happens because some of the media clearly do not serve the public interest, but partial interests of certain centers of power", says Vuković.

Distance from the public interest in media's operations is something that Goran Đurović[12], Resident Advisor in the TACSO[13] Montenegro Office, also notes.

"The media often act as those who are in a political market – they are very well aware of what can be their interest at a certain moment and this interest will lead them to conclusions of partnerships that may very well end the very next day. The hint of a lucrative opportunity is what tips the scale. There is nothing that is not business, including politics. To protect their business, they will make different deals. Sometimes they will be guided by moral principles, and sometimes they won't", says Đurović.

In recent years, media in Montenegro suffered the so-called tabloidization, where a clear advantage is given to affairs and scandals at the expense of more serious research and analysis. The most drastic examples include blatant smear campaigns against CSO activists and some politicians.

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[10] Interview with the Deputy Executive Director of the Network for Affirmation of NGO Sector – MANS, Dejan Milovac, Podgorica, 26 June 2016.
[11] Interview with journalist and media analyst, Draguljub Duško Vuković, Podgorica, 23 June 2016.
[12] Interview with Resident Advisor in TACSO Montenegro Office, Goran Đurović, Podgorica, 21 June 2016.
[13] Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) is an EU funded projects that provides support to civil society organisations (CSOs) in countries that are not yet part of the EU.

The victim of one such campaign run by Serbian-based tabloid Informer, was prominent anticorruption activists, executive director of MANS, Vanja Ćalović.

Her colleague Dejan Milovac says that it is evident that several media work with the specific task of putting pressure on government critics, through the vilest campaigns possible.

"Because of what we do, MANS is often the target of such media who do not choose the means in their attempts to discredit our work and, unfortunately, often threaten the physical integrity of our employees. Of course, we thereby defend even better our research and invest the extra effort that Montenegro becomes the society that its citizens deserve", adds Milovac.

Despite the obstacles, Milovac says that there is still media space for high-quality stories and analysis. What is even more, MANS' Investigative Centre, in partnership with daily "Vijesti" and "Dan" and weekly "Monitor", implemented the project "Pod lupom" /"Under the Magnifying Glass"/ whose main product were investigative journalism stories. One such story was awarded the second prize of the 2015 EU Award for Investigative Journalism contest in Montenegro. The awarded dossier "Dishonorable alliances", through four separate stories, revealed the connection between politics, business and organized crime in Montenegro.

Milovac, who co-authored the awarded story, says that free and professional media are the natural allies of all those NGOs who dare to point out the most important problems in the country, call the government to account and propose concrete solutions. "Without media support, the effect and impact of our work would be greatly limited", concludes Milovac.

When civil society and media meet

The Council of national public broadcaster RTCG, in line with the 2012 Law on Public Broadcasting Services[14], is independent of any State authority, consisting of 9 members, who are experts proposed by civil society organisations and appointed by the Parliament by simple majority. They are nominated by universities, the academy of science, cultural institutions, employers associations, trade unions, sports, NGOs working in the field of media, while two members are elected among the candidates of NGOs active in the field of human rights, environment, consumers' rights, education, social welfare or rights of disabled persons.

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[14] Law 79/08 and 45/12 on Public Broadcasting Services of Montenegro, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, 23 December 2008 and 18 August 2012. Art. 28.

The council of the regulatory authority - Agency for Electronic Media[15] consists of five members, appointed by the Parliament from among the nominees of academia, NGOs dealing with human rights and freedoms, NGOs dealing with the media, the Montenegrin PEN Center, and commercial broadcaster associations.

Although the law prescribes rules for the election of councils' members with the proclaimed goal of preventing political influence, the elections procedure, as a rule, raises doubts of its legality and indirect influence of the ruling parties on the choice of the RTCG Council. During the election procedure of the last RTCG Council (2014), the Administrative Committee of the Parliament of Montenegro decided to change the rules for the selection of candidates from NGOs. The introduced rule stipulates that in order to run someone for the RTCG Council, they should submit a tax return. It happened, then, that one candidate was eliminated although she had more than 90 votes of support from a total of 108[16]. In a most recent case of elections of NGO representative to the Council of the Agency for electronic media (May 2016), the Administrative Committee decided to support a candidate who had less support from NGOs and work experience, although those were main criteria for selection[17].

Goran Đurović argues that, in this case, the Administrative Committee selected a candidate who suits them personally, not the one who had the legal basis for election, thus making the law irrelevant.

"The media are connected with mediocrities of political parties and non-governmental organizations. Those personal relations between people who stifle this country, and who are at the level of friendships from study visits, lunches or seminars at the sea or mountain, are quite enough to secure the support for certain people from NGOs, and to disrespect the law. Similarly, media use similar small privileges and do not care about serious investigations into anything. If we had serious dialogue on any topic in Montenegro, then we might reach some conclusion on whether the law was violated and, maybe, have some consequences for such acts", says Đurović. He adds that interests in this situation are clear from all sides: NGOs, political parties and some media - "Someone's vital interest is to get the fee

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[15] Law 46/10, 40/11, 53/11 on Electronic Media, *Official Gazette of Montenegro*, 06 August 2010, 08 August 2011, 11 November 2011. Art. 19.

[16] Milena Perović-Korać, "Nova igra, stari akteri", Monitor no. 1223, 28 March 2014, See: http://monitor.co.me/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5105:izbor-za-savjet-rtcg-stara-igra-novi-akteri&catid=3510:broj-1223&Itemid=4774

[17] "IA razočarana izborom Koljenovića: Doprinos monopolu u upravljanju elektronskim medijima", Vijesti, 21 June 2016, See: http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/ia-razocarana-izborom-koljenovica-doprinos-monopolu-u-upravljanju-elektronskim-medijima-893224

of 800 euros, someone else has an interest to control the electronic media through those who got these 800 euros, and, of course, some media, as end beneficiaries, will be able to work without paying duties to the state, and not producing the legally required amount of programs".

Đurović himself is also a member of the RTCG's Council, whose voice has often been dissonant with the rest of his colleagues. He admits that the effects of NGO representatives' participation in the Council were very limited. Without wider support inside this body that would introduce measureable and clear tasks for PBS management and a call for the responsibility of all decision makers, the best that he could do is to continue with the attempts of bringing to public attention issues that are burdening the functioning of the public service broadcaster. Đurović's initiatives before the Council were even left without the support of his colleague, the other of the two NGO representatives in the RTCG Council, coming from human rights organisation Civic Alliance. The president of this organisation Boris Raonic, says, however, that their representative was quite efficient. A list of at least 30 initiatives with a written record contains proposals for specialised informative shows, resolutions of conflict of interest; respect for work discipline, initiatives for debt reduction, financial management, enhancements in programs in minority languages, and more. "The functioning of PBS is a highly politicized issue. If you have 6 people who will always support the same stance, then you›re going head on against the wall if you try to change it. Then, why focus on something that is beyond our reach or his knowledge. He decided to act within a narrow aspect for which he was elected - human rights. This is less visible to the general public because media reports are limited to the two extreme points of view on the matter, but most things are happening in the middle. It's just not interesting enough for the media", says Raonić.

Vuković believes that the civil sector through their representatives in the Council of RTCG has done a lot by publicly opening some important issues related to the functioning of public service and imposed a debate on a national public service is not and what it should be. The Council of AEM, in his opinion, does not have the same transparency. "The media do not report on the work of the Council. The only communication is through press releases published on the Council meetings, and I do not remember that representatives of CSO have raised problems regarding certain broadcasters who, in my opinion, seriously violate the rules and principles adopted by the Council itself", adds Vuković.

Milovac sees no significant progress when it comes to the work of the public service because, he claims, its managerial team is still dominated by installed formal or informal supporters of the regime. In this sense, the impact of that part of NGO representatives in the steering council who

advocate genuine changes is still powerless against the majority in these bodies. Substantial improvements in the quality of public service are still not happening and it continues to be nothing more than a tool for creating a distorted image of the Montenegrin reality, serving more the party, than the public interest, concludes Milovac.

The bridge: Media – NGO-s

In Montenegro, the crisis of organizing journalists in representative and credible associations has lasted for a long time now. There are a number of journalists' organizations at the national level (the Association of Journalists of Montenegro, Association of Professional Journalists of Montenegro, and Montenegrin Association of Journalists) but they exist mainly on paper. They don't provide any significant services to their members and have no actual influence.

It is not professional reasons that cause this professional disunity, but rather political ones. The media scene is sharply divided along the lines of political affiliation or orientation.

"The media serve partial interests, and while this is the case, there can be no common denominator that could unite them. One part of the journalistic community in the early 90s gathered around the idea of distancing themselves from the policies of the then joint associations of journalists which placed themselves at the service of political authorities. And that was not a professional, but political reason for gathering. All subsequent divisions within the media were also political. We do not have anything that is recognized as professional interest that should be articulated and defended. And when that is missing, there is no need for uniting," explains Vuković.

According to a study done by the Center for Democracy and Monitoring and OSCE in 2014, more than 80% of journalists do not belong to any journalists' associations.

In April 2013, the Media union was founded, which operates within the framework of Free Trade Unions of Montenegro. This is the first serious attempt at union organization of journalists and other media professionals in Montenegro.

Media, civil society, and public participation

The latest EC's report on Montenegro's EU integration process notes that some progress was made in improving cooperation between the government and civil society organisations, especially concerning the

latter's' participation in the accession process, where civil society continued to play an active role. A TACSO needs assessment report notes that in 2014, 55 representatives of CSOs participated in the work of 36 working bodies formed by the government. On the other hand, data shows that only 25% of CSOs participated in the consultation process both at the local and national level, which is a sharp fall from 57% recorded in 2012.

On various occasions, civil society representatives have voiced their dissatisfaction with their level of involvement in policy-making. The EC recommends greater transparency in government procedures for cooperation and consultation with CSOs, especially in legislation drafting as well as the establishment of sustainable system of financing of CSOs.

Raonić argues that the strength of the CSO sector in Montenegro, is among other things, a result of one specific national circumstance. "The Montenegrin civil sector has a lot more space than their colleagues in other countries in the region. We have a government that is corrupt and untouchable, which leaves huge space to all those who want to improve things. In other countries, this space is occupied by democratic opposition, universities, and intellectuals – while here those public life groups are almost nonexistent", says Raonić. He admits, however, that making a change sometimes is not easy. "We were part of certain bodies and left them because we have seen that nothing can be done there - but if we can help fix a law or insert a paragraph in a strategy, then it's worth the effort", says Raonić.

There is a relatively small number of CSOs that have been active for a decade and a half and which have accumulated significant know-how in their respective areas, have become prominent in public life, and proactively offer suggestions and propose solutions to the ongoing reforms.

Đurović say that it is difficult to obtain greater influence of CSO initiatives due to the lack of knowledge in key positions in decision-making bodies. Another obstacle is the general reluctance in transferring power from institutions and political parties to citizens. "Transfer of power is the basis of the game being played and it is natural. The NGO sector is counter government because they want to be able to transfer part of the game to the citizens", says Đurović. Sometimes, he argues this "beautiful game we all play is played in vain". "The change will come when citizens are able to decide whether a certain individual should be their representative in the parliament again, if he/she did not manage to solve the problems which were bothering them during his/her 4-year mandate. There is too many of those whose interest is that nothing changes," concludes Đurović.

All of the interviewed CSO representatives see problems within their sector also. While Raonić sees as the biggest problem some of the largest

NGOs that, according to him, turn to technocrats, following primarily the donors' interests, while, often, at the same time pose as "know-it-alls." On the other hand, Milovac says that it is no secret that most of the political parties, at least unofficially, have their own non-governmental organizations with whose help they are trying to create a false picture of cooperation with civil society or on some fundamental social issue.

Besides cooperation with traditional media in pursuing the citizen's interest, interviewed representatives of the civil sector for the major part agree that social networks have become an inevitable tool to mobilize people around common issues.

Raonić says that social networks have become more relevant than the print media. As an example, he states that during the opposition protest in October 2015, the post they shared on Facebook and Twitter reached the people faster than via traditional media. He, however, warns of the danger of the abuses. "Political parties have recognized the strengths of social media and even had people trained to post comments on social media and internet portals using fake identities thus trying to influence public opinion or a persons' image", says Raonic.

In May 2016, the case of a lost boy that had been shared through social media with CSO representatives moderating the campaign of information sharing and organisation of citizens searches proved extremely effective. In just two days, 20,000 people were involved, ready to engage in the action.

Milovac also says that the real value of social networks when it comes to civic activism is that they allow citizens to organize themselves outside the formal framework offered by non-governmental organizations and more independently than it was the case in the past to fight for their rights.

Conclusions

Civil society and the media are the main carriers of the public participation in public discussions on almost all major social issues in Montenegro, although there is still much room for improvement in both sectors and in their cooperation. In some areas, such as corruption and organized crime, or even human rights, due to the lack of political will and lack of trust in official institutions, non-governmental organizations and the media are the main partners of citizens in their efforts to protect their rights.

Media sensibility to important CSO initiatives is present, but the situation within the media community itself does not offer sufficient room for likely or fast improvements. Current divisions within the media community and their alignment along political lines draw them farther from public interest and

jeopardizes professional standards. This situation makes the functioning of professional associations impossible, and without unified voices of the media community, progress is difficult to achieve. Another problem is the dependence of the PBS on governing structures, which limits the space for joint initiatives aimed at the promotion of citizens' interest. Sporadic examples of cooperation between part of the media and CSOs still proves that this model can yield significant results.

As for the CSO sector, it has proven constant strength in playing the role that has been given to it in democratic societies. It remained resilient in front of obstacles and has yielded significant capacities that may play an important role in areas such as the ongoing process of European integration. Recent developments however show that attempts for the politicization of NGOs and deepening divisions between them can be taken as a serious threat to the sector's integrity.

Provided there is a will, a sustainable system of state financing for CSOs and even fostering cooperation with the media would be a major step forward, paving the way for more transfer of power to citizens.

SERBIA

A complex set of cooperation and confrontation lines

Jovan Teokarevic

Relations between media and civil society are of crucial importance for contemporary politics. They reveal a complex set of cooperation and confrontation lines within a very specific part of the society that stands between citizens and the political sphere.

It goes without saying that democracy heavily depends on both a vibrant civil society and independent media. Seen from this perspective, the two actors are often understood as one, or as indispensable allies. The example of Serbia confirms this view to some extent, but has many specifics that call for a detailed examination of internal dynamics in their mutual relations.

This will be done here in several steps. First we will outline the media and civil society landscapes, and then we'll try to figure out what one actor thinks of the other one. Their joint actions and interactions will be analyzed, too. In the end, we'll try to find out what the influence of the civil society and media on citizens' participation is.

Media landscape in flux

The main feature of Serbia's media scene is that it has been in flux, or in the state of almost permanent and still unfinished transition for the last decade and a half. Despite the introduction of a number of legal, institutional and policy changes in the media system following Serbia's turn to democracy in 2000, many old problems have remained, many new ones have appeared, but the system still has not reached the long awaited stability and functionality.[1]

Judging by numbers only, Serbia seems to have a very rich and flourishing media scene. With the population of 7.2 million, Serbia has more than 700 print media outlets, 300 radio stations, 120 TV stations and around 200

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[1] More about this and other features of the Serbian media scene in: R. Veljanovski, *Medijski sistem Srbije*, Fakultet političkih nauka i Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 2012, pp. 41-52. See also Global Media Monitoring. Project 2015, *National Report, Serbia*, 2015.

online news portals. No other country in Europe has more TV stations per capita than Serbia![2]

These seemingly respectable data pale, however, in the light of the quantity of shortcomings and challenges that the current media system is faced with. One important part of them is connected with the lack of implementation of a generally good recent set of laws passed in 2014, which are formally in harmony with EU standards and recommendations. Among other things, the laws were supposed to put an end to state ownership in all media outlets in 2015. The national news agency Tanjug continued to operate, however, in spite of that provision and of many protests, while the state also continued to finance some media outlets in other less transparent ways. The state share of ownership also has remained unchanged in influential dailies Politika and Vecernje novosti. The budget financing of two public service broadcasters – the national one RTV Serbia and the regional one RTV Vojvodina – is supposed to be replaced in 2016 with a special tax, according to new laws, but the solution is still not in sight and that contributes to the financial instability and lack of independence of both.

The country's media scene also suffers from several long-term and systemic problems, among which the most important being: a) Non-transparency of media ownership; b) Non-transparency of financing, economic influence through budget, tax reliefs and other indirect forms of public funding; c) Censorship and self-censorship; d) Very high level of politicization and tabloidization.[3]

Political influence over media by the power-holders is certainly not a new phenomenon in Serbia, but the grip on media has been radically strengthened since 2012, when incumbent Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic and his Serbian Progressive Party came to power. Within a form of almost unlimited personal rule, Vucic relies heavily on the support of primarily one national TV network (Pink) and several tabloids (led by daily Informer), but he controls other key electronic and print media in less direct ways, too. In the absence of checks and balances, as well as of a political opposition, Vucic's unprecedented level of control over most media in Serbia has led to the serious suffocation of media freedoms and freedom of expression, particularly in 2014 and 2015. Media outlets that lost independence have turned into powerful propaganda machinery working around the clock in favor of the authorities and against any opposition, or even against any

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[2] https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/serbia
[3] See the Serbian Government Anti-Corruption Council's 2015 Report on ownership structure and control over media in Serbia: http://www.antikorupcija-savet.gov.rs/en-GB/reports/cid1028-2751/presentation-of-report-on-ownership-structure-and-control-over-media-in-serbia

critical voice that might be heard in public. The European Commission's 2015 Report on Serbia criticized this turn, emphasizing that "The overall environment is not conducive to the full exercise of freedom of expression."[4] Freedom House 2016 Report on Press Freedoms put Serbia in the category of "partly free countries"[5], and the organization Reporters Without Borders ranks Serbia 59th out of 180 countries in its 2016 World Press Freedom Index.[6] All analyses point out that media outlets and journalists in Serbia are under double pressure from politicians and media owners who exert heavy influence on editorial content. In the situation of worsening market conditions for the survival of the media, they are heavily dependent on government subsidies and advertising contracts mostly controlled by the government, too.

This is followed by threats to journalists for the opinions expressed, by the closure of some of their popular programs and also by physical attacks on them. Journalists have become helpless and incapable of self-defense due to their meagre salaries, insecure job positions, and the absence of solidarity among them. No wonder that within such a context censorship and self-censorship have resurfaced. Sixty two per cent of 1,100 journalists surveyed in 2015 declared that there was no freedom of information in Serbia, 77% said that the state controls media, while more than two thirds estimated that "self-censorship has grown very much".[7]

Other similar surveys only confirm all this. For instance, the Serbian Journalists' Association found out in a survey from 2014 that close to 6 per cent of journalists felt that they were constantly exposed to censorship, while almost 41 per cent of them said they recognized it "from time to time".[8] "Soft" versions of censorship have become particularly frequent and important instruments of curtailing media freedoms in Serbia's current media landscape. A recent study defined it as "the array of official actions intended to influence media output, short of legal or extra-legal bans, direct censorship of specific content, or physical attacks on media outlets or media practitioners. These indirect forms of censorship include selective media subsidies and partisan allocation of advertising, as well as biased application

4 European Commission, 2015 *Serbia Report*, p. 17: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_serbia.pdf
5 https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2016
6 https://rsf.org/en/ranking
7 Srećko Mihajlović, ed., *Od novinara do nadničara. Prekarizacija rada i života*, http://www.mc.rs/upload/documents/NAJAVE/2016/januar/sazetak-knjige.pdf, p. 2.
8 UNS, *Research report on the economic and professional status of journalists*, March-September 2014: http://www.uns.org.rs/sw4i/download/files/article/

of regulatory and licensing powers that can influence editorial content and affect media outlets' viability."[9]

Civil Society: Developed but weak and not trusted

The civil society landscape in Serbia resembles the already described media landscape: the number of civil society organizations (CSOs) is quite big, but citizens neither recognize the sector's significance for their everyday lives, nor have much trust in it.

According to official data from August 2016, there are 26,942 CSOs in Serbia.[10] A quarter of them were established before 1990. More than half of them were registered after 2010. This sharp rise in the last several years can be clearly seen from the following chart:
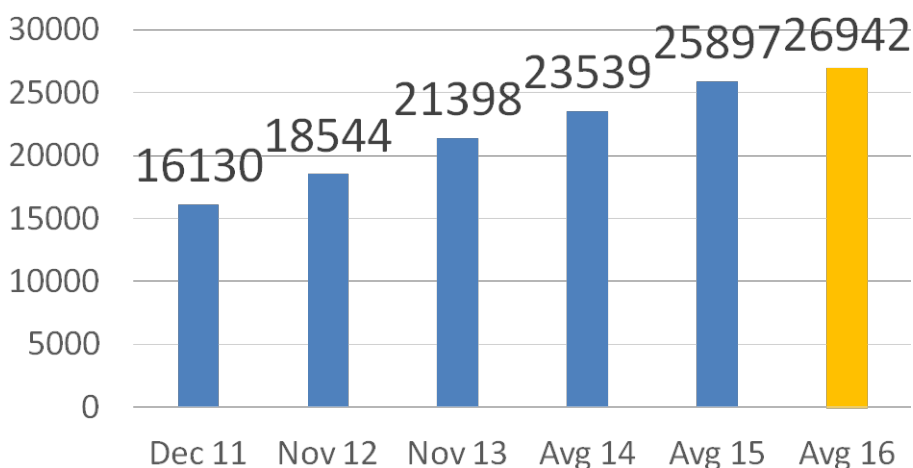
Source: Nacionalna koalicija za decentralizaciju, *Indeks održivosti OCD u Srbiji, 2015. godina*, p. 36

As is the case in other countries, a good part of these organizations is not active: in 2014, a little less than 18,000 CSOs submitted their financial reports.[11] Most CSOs primarily deal with youth (15%), human rights and environment (11% each), education and social inclusion (6% each).

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[9] World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, *Media Reform Stalled in the Slow Lane. Soft Censorship in Serbia*, Paris, 2015, p. 5.

[10] Nacionalna koalicija za decentralizaciju, *Indeks održivosti OCD u Srbiji, 2015. godina*, p. 36, http://decentralizacija.org.rs/tmp/IOCD2015-Srbija-final.pdf

[11] Civic Initiative, *Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development. Serbia Report*, Belgrade, 2015, p. 10.

The number of permanently employed staff in Serbian CSOs is currently probably around 7,000 (in 2014: 6,651).[12] This is arguably a very big total work force, as only eight companies in Serbia have more permanently employed people than the whole civil sector.[13] Although there are no fresh data, one could assume from the data of several years ago that approximately the same number of persons – 7,000 - is currently engaged half-time in Serbian CSOs, together with 150,000 volunteers.[14] However, one should be careful with such data, as official statistics puts churches and religious organizations, as well as sport clubs and Red Cross, in the same category with genuine non-governmental organizations or CSOs. Red Cross alone has, for example, more than 60,000 volunteers. They are all financed from the same Serbian budget line. CSOs in the narrow sense of the word are certainly getting a much smaller part of around EUR 120 million per year, in comparison with Government's financing of sport clubs or religious organizations.

The total value of all budget grants to all kinds of CSOs in Serbia is around 0.75% of the Serbian GDP, which is more than EUR 250 million per year.[15] But, one half of CSOs either don't have any grants, or their grants per year are less than 100,000 dinars (less than EUR 900).[16]

Several years ago, in 2010, the majority of Serbian CSOs had a budget of less than EUR 20,000, and only every tenth of them had a budget of over EUR 100,000.[17] There is no reliable data on the volume of CSO grants that arrive from abroad, but most leading CSOs are increasingly relying on foreign grants.

When it comes to the image that CSOs have in the Serbian society, it is a very different story, indeed. People are by and large not familiar with their work; CSOs are rarely present in the media, and they are far from being popular. On the contrary: they are not trusted and people often perceive them as traitors, who are well-paid by foreign donors. Practically all relevant public opinion polls show these results, with minor variations. According to a recent survey 61% of Serbian citizens do not trust CSOs, but trust in all institutions is quite low, too – on average less than 50%. As many as 57% of citizens do not trust the media.[18]

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[12] Građanske inicijative, *Ekonomska vrednost neprofitnog sektora u Srbiji u 2013. i 2014. godini*, Beograd, 2014, p. 9.
[13] Beta, *U Srbiji 15.700 NVO sa oko 4.200 zaposlenih*, 20. 10. 2011.
[14] Građanske inicijative, *Procena stanja u sektoru organizacija civilnog društva (OCD) u Srbiji*, septembar, 2011, Beograd, p. 8.
[15] Ibid.
[16] *Nacionalna strategija za stvaranje podsticajnog okruženja za razvoj civilnog društva u Republici Srbiji za period 2015-2019. godine*, nacrt, Beograd, 2015.
[17] Beta, ibid.
[18] Beta, "Građani Srbije ne veruju institucijama", *Euractiv Srbija*, 02.01.2015.

In mid-2014, a survey done by the (US) National Democratic Institute and (Serbian) CESID showed more of the same: 46% of the population did not trust NGOs, while 32% did.[19] Since media do not follow CSOs activities much (as will be shown later), people are usually ignorant about them, except for one thing that has been almost constantly served by the Government propaganda and tabloids: that CSOs are working in their own particular interests instead of in the interest of the society. A survey on the citizens' political participation thus found out in 2013 that only a little more than one third of the respondents guessed what CSOs are all about ("non-profit associations of citizens gathered around a specific topic, with the aim to foster changes in society without coming to power"). Thirty six per cent of the respondents understood CSO-s instead as "international political organizations with their offices in Serbia through which they represent their own interests". The third group of 29% of citizens opted for the CSO definition as "non-party organizations of politically like-minded people who propagate their ideas independently from official government policy or from the state".[20]

This way of thinking took shape a long time ago and has survived almost unchanged. It represents a fertile ground for the renewal of ambitious government attacks and accusations on CSOs under Serbia's incumbent political regime. As will be shown in further sections of this paper, attacks have been relentless and continued, because a part of CSOs and media outlets expose the ugly face of the Prime Minister's absolutist rule, with violations of human rights, undermining of institutions and efforts aimed at silencing every dissenting voice.

That's why there are serious concerns about the very survival of independent and critical civil society and media in the situation of parallel political pressures and reduced financing, as they have to rely mostly on grants from foreign countries. The 2015 CSO Sustainability Score for Serbia found out that the general CSO sustainability score for Serbia is 4.1, on a scale between 7 (impeded) and 1 (enhanced).[21] And although Serbia's legal environment worsened a bit in 2015 due to the mentioned pressures (4.0, down from 3.9 in 2014), the organizational capacities of the country's CSO have slightly improved, as has their financial viability (from 5.2 in 2014 to 4.8 in 2015). Other indicators in this survey show the same level of sustainability – mostly in the middle between the impeded and enhanced poles, or they are a little worse. All in all, Serbia's civil society organizations are in a very difficult situation, but most of them are still capable of surviving.

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[19] I. Anojčić, "Zašto su građani nepoverljivi prema NVO", *Politika*, 01.06.2014.

[20] Centar za istraživanje, transparentnost i odgovornost (CRTA), *Učešće građana u demokratskim procesima u Srbiji*, Istraživanje javnog mnjenja, Beograd, 2013, p. 4.

[21] *The 2015 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/EuropeEurasia_CSOSIReport_2015.pdf, p. 214.

Media coverage of civil society

Civil society organizations nowadays have very restricted access to most Serbian media. Their activities are only to some extent followed and this is done by the minority of media outlets that are not under direct or indirect control of the incumbent political regime. The controlled media report virtually nothing about them, except when they get the opportunity – and obviously the directive, too - to attack them, accusing them of lack of patriotism and of the alleged wealth they have accumulated in exchange for their "treacherous" activities. In these situations, carefully planned smear campaigns are organized, with countless exposures of fabricated lies or half-truths that are being relentlessly repeated. It goes without saying that the sacred journalistic rule *Audiatur et altera pars* (The other side should be heard, too) gets blatantly omitted in such cases, and the public is denied hearing the arguments of CSO representatives.

But even in rare occasions when Serbia's CSOs are mentioned in the independent media, systematic coverage of this sector is still lacking. This is especially true if compared with the situation in the immediate aftermath of the introduction of democracy in Serbia, in 2000. Ten or fifteen years ago, civil society was understood by media not as a competitor or political rival of the government, but as an ally in much needed reforms, whose ideas and recommendations were worth hearing and debating in public, regardless of the level of criticism they used to have vis-a-vis the leading political actors. At that time, so different from the present one, one could find detailed coverage of all kinds of CSO activities in most Serbian media outlets, including reports about their conferences or advocacy campaigns, or of their direct cooperation or confrontation with political authorities. This time around, the media space is closed for civil society as an irreplaceable factor of permanent control over the government and political actors. It is as simple as that: instead of the exchange of ideas and debate, in the most read and watched media outlets, the Serbian public can today hear only one side – the official one, of course – together with countless and distasteful glorifications of the Government and its leader. Instead of offering unbiased news coupled with various free comments, the majority of Serbian media have become a genuine propaganda service of the ruling party. Occasional mentioning of CSOs in independent media does not essentially change this state of affairs: for most people, they do not exist at all and serve only in the role of the "public enemy" within staged scandals orchestrated by the increasingly popular tabloids that follow the official line.

The absence of civil society from the Serbian mainstream media should be, however, explained from another perspective – the one of CSOs, namely.

The majority of Serbia's civil society organizations are incapable or unwilling, or both, of presenting their activities to the public in a clear and interesting way, and in harmony with the requirements and opportunities that modern media are imposing and offering. Many CSOs lack the knowledge they could use in order to win a part of the increasingly shrinking media space. They are more oriented toward donors than toward the wider public, and they tend to merely promote their missions and activities rather than to mobilize citizens. In doing so, CSOs very often rely only on social media which is certainly necessary, but not enough for a more aggressive and successful information campaign. In addition, they do not use modern PR skills, which inevitably make the content they offer less appealing than sensationalistic "journalism" preferred by today's media.

CSOs are currently trying to overcome some of these shortcomings, and the results are, for the time being, more visible in local than in national media outlets. That's certainly an encouraging sign, but a lot remains to be done, if CSOs want to get out of the imposed and self-imposed isolation they've been suffering from for too long. Particularly worrying is the lack of wider coverage of rare but important advances of their cooperation with the Government, for example in the area of EU integration where stable civil society monitoring mechanisms have been functional for a few years now. The quality and the volume of CSOs recommendations in this field, often accepted by the official negotiating team with the EU, has thus remained virtually unnoticed in the media.

This section of the paper was supposed to present the qualitative and quantitative results of a two-week monitoring of several media outlets and websites, i.e. of their coverage of CSOs. Despite considerable efforts, however, it was genuinely impossible to find any meaningful coverage of civil society in the Serbian media, be they under the Government's control or not, within the period of two weeks. This finding is just one argument more in favor of the already described virtual absence of CSOs in Serbian media. So, instead of doing this, I'll present here a months-long public debate about the foreign funding of CSOs, initiated by several articles published in daily Politika.

The debate was launched with the text "Pathways of American money: Who is getting dollars?" published on 28 December 2015 in Politika. The journalist found out that during the last nine years US foundations had donated USD 35 million to Serbian CSOs for various projects. The text has complete lists of donors, the volume of their grants and the recipients in Serbia. A day after, the topic continues with further details of the main findings, under the headline "Who are the biggest donors of the Serbian civil society". On 7 January 2016, the third article appeared in this "Politika's Dossier" as the series was being referred to, with an even more intriguing

headline: "How to make USD 45,000 by publishing old texts". Shifting focus mostly on media projects supported by American donors, among other things, it mocks a web portal that got the grant for the reproduction of war-mongering media pieces from the times of ex-Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. Three days later grants for Kosovo- and Montenegro-based projects was the topic ("Sympathies for Kosovo and Montenegro", 10 January 2016).

Politika's four-part "Dossier" led to many fierce reactions and a lot of criticism of independent media and CSOs, as well as of many journalists. Some of them were published on the pages of Politika on 15 January 2016. Critiques pointed out several main objections that could be summarized in four points. First, although the whole series was presented as a good example of uncompromising and brave investigative journalism, it relied completely on publicly available data taken from the website of the US Foundation Center (http://foundationcenter.org/). This was correctly mentioned in the criticized texts, but it was unprofessional and misleading for the readers to treat this as a kind of a sensation. Reactions missed to mention, however, that the quoted data set was in many instances wrong and far from being complete; it was thus genuinely inaccurate. Secondly, the allegedly big revelation has not been accompanied by similar research of open or covert state funding of "obedient" media and CSOs in Serbia by the Government. Neither was Politika's intention ever to search for cases of mismanagement of grants from the Serbian national budget or from local budgets given to loyal allies of power holders which allowed easy purchase of media outlets. Last but not least, Politika was criticized for in fact compiling a sort of "list of foreign mercenaries" that could be used for public defamation (which was done) and for political prosecution, which might follow suit, as critiques warned.

The author replied on 16 January, claiming that figures speak for themselves, and that it was strange that CSOs and media who supposedly share Western values were trying to exclude themselves from transparency. Critiques were particularly appalled by the fact that the author got a newly-established journalistic reward for the texts from the "Dossier" that violated professional standards. The debate moved further on when windows of the House of Human Rights and Democracy in Belgrade – a seat of several human rights CSOs – were broken during the night in the second part of January 2016. Those who didn't like the "Dossier" connected the campaign against the "foreign mercenaries" and "traitors" with this incident, and saw it as a natural continuation of the campaign. Politika replied that these were dangerous and unfounded insinuations.

The escalation of the debate that included many CSOs, political parties and intellectuals was temporarily discontinued with the Prime Minister

Vucic's sudden statement at a conference a month later that "the engagement of the civil sector is good for Serbia" and that his Government will continue cooperating with CSOs (Politika, 25 February 2016). This probably came as an official reaction to the rising criticism of the EU and many influential countries to the campaign launched by Politika's "Dossier". Vucic seemed to have understood that he had to back down and pretend that he was not behind the accusations against the civil society. He also met the EU representative in Serbia whom he had previously accused of sponsoring CSOs that criticize the Government. He organized well publicized similar meetings, with some CSOs representatives, trying to show that his Government didn't have anything to do with the attack on CSOs, and that Politika did this on its own. It was hard to take this seriously, as accusations of CSOs and attacks on them were previously largely presented in many media outlets that supported the Government.

This alleged truce between the Government and the civil society didn't last long, however, at least as far as Politika was concerned. On 19 May 2016 the "Dossier" author continued in the same way, presenting the CSO-related ultra-restrictive legislature of Russia, China and Israel as models that might be followed elsewhere, Serbia included.

After a pause of several months, the "Dossier" author was back on the pages of Politika on 12 June 2016, this time around with another set of data that were supposed to prove that Serbia's grants to its CSOs equal the total amount Serbian science gets in a year.

On 7 July, another journalist of Politika continued where her colleague stopped temporarily: the text "Euros for old buddies" this time displayed the amounts of recent EU grants to Serbian media and civil society organizations. Stating the obvious – that grants were given in a legal and transparent way - one of the grantees replied in an angry tone on 11 July, stressing that Politika "is not dealing with projects, but with targeting people", which is why the article in question is "dangerous content", she added.

Politika's "Dossier" was also the subject of deliberation at the Appeals Committee of the (Serbian independent) Press Council, too. The Committee concluded on 26 February 2016 that one of the texts published within the "Dossier" violated two principles from the Serbian Journalists' Code and ordered Politika to publish the conclusion.

The spirit of Politika's series of texts about foreign funding for Serbian CSOs and media continued in a much more drastic way in August 2016 on the pages of another Serbian daily – Informer. This tabloid, infamous for its undivided support to the Serbian Prime Minister Vucic and in parallel for a very aggressive and primitive treatment of all of Vucic's real and imagined competitors, on 16 August 2016 published a long text entitled "Soros gave

almost four million Euros for the chaos in Serbia". The text contains a long list of several pages of all Soros' Open Society Foundation for Serbia donations between 2011 and 2014. The data became available following a hacker's attack on the Open Society Foundation (New York) website.

In the very beginning, the article announces the conspiracy behind the Soros funding in Serbia: "The evil American tycoon George Soros, the man who stays behind the so-called colored revolutions in Eastern Europe, an unscrupulous billionaire who is also responsible for the bloody war in Ukraine, doesn't spare big money with which he would certainly like to push Serbia in total chaos, too." A further, more detailed explanation then follows: "The biggest part, almost two thirds of the money was paid in 2013 and 2014, thus following Aleksandar Vucic's power takeover. And although Soros is giving money officially for the 'development of democracy' and for 'the promotion of civil society', it is clear that millions are almost exclusively planned in order to destroy Serbia as a state and to bring American puppets to power", concludes Informer, in the same way it had exposed several other alleged conspiracies against Vucic.

All in all, those two tales of two Serbian dailies, Politika and Informer, speak generally of one and the same thing: a hostile attitude of media close to the center of power in Serbia towards civil society organizations. There are certainly differences between Politika's softer and Informer's much harder approach, but in principle both of them are sending the same message. To be sure, it's less about the very foreign funding and much more about the fact that the incumbent Serbian regime cannot and doesn't want to imagine cohabitation with such social actors, or with any critical voice from the society for that matter, because it would endanger the regime's very basis – an absolute and, in principle, indivisible power.

Civil Society on Media

Civil society organizations have, generally speaking, divided opinions on media in Serbia and their opinions mostly depend on how open media outlets are for the activities of CSOs, or in other words how big this coverage is and whether it is neutral, favorable or critical.

CSOs engaged in non-political areas are not as critical towards media as those dealing with political issues. The reason for this is logical: the former ones have more open access to media, as they do not endanger the Government's line, and the media coverage of their activities tends to be more favorable. The media access of the latter ones is, however, more restricted and mostly limited to media outlets that are more independent from the Government. As already indicated in the previous section of this paper,

politically oriented CSOs remain either completely absent from government-dependent media outlets, or often become a target of attack.

A similar division exists between the attitudes of CSOs on local media on one side, and on national ones, on the other. This almost completely reflects the level of coverage of CSO activities in the first or in the second group. CSOs think much better of local media outlets as they are open to civil society, while the national media are more closed, which in turn makes them look worse, if not hostile to CSO members.

These are in a nutshell conclusions of interviews with several civil society leaders, done during the preparation of this paper. They are also confirmed by some – although rare – public opinion polls on the matter. Their results will be presented following another argument that confirms the conclusions. It's about the general public's understanding of the CSO-media relations.

Most of the respondents (49% in 2006, 45% in 2009 and 48% in 2014) think that media do not cover CSO activities "much", as can be seen from the chart below.[22] Between one quarter of interviewed people in 2006 and one third of them in 2014 are of the opinion that media do not cover CSO activities "as much as they should". In contrast to the large majority that the previous two opinions combined make (more than 80%) is the opinion that CSO activities are covered "too much". The general public is, in other words, very unsatisfied with a low presence of CSO activities in the media.

In your opinion, to what extent do media cover activities of NGOs?
Base: those who know what a non-governmental organization is (58% in 2014, 56% in 2009, and 54% in 2006)

	2006	2009	2014
DK-REF	9%	8%	7%
Too much	18%	16%	15%
As much as they should	25%	32%	31%
Not very much	49%	44%	48%
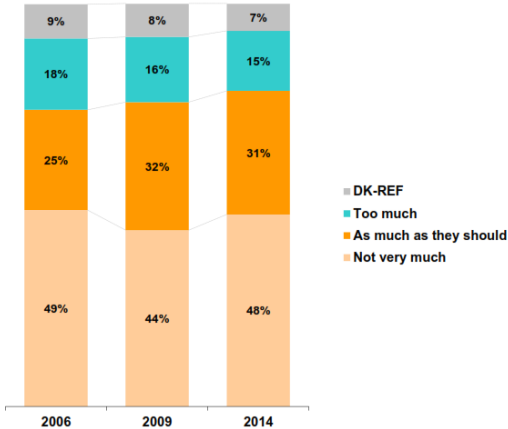
In comparison to 2009, more people in 2014 think that media do not cover activities of NGO very much

ProPozitiv

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[22] Propozitiv, *Public perception and attitudes towards NGO sector in Serbia*, Belgrade, 2014.

Curiously enough, CSOs seem to have a less critical approach towards media than the general public. But that is the conclusion of a survey done in 2011, before the Serbian Progressive Party took power.[23] As there have been no reliable data in the meantime, two explanations are in order here. First, things have gone much worse in the meantime, i.e. ever since the incumbent power holders took office. Of equal importance is the fact that more optimistic attitudes of the public were expressed in an unusual time – during catastrophic floods in Serbia, when the public was able to see at least some news on CSO engagement in this situation, along with the expected exaggeration of Government's efforts.

So, before a tighter grip on media took place, CSOs showed some dissatisfaction with the media, but most of the interviewed ones were satisfied with the cooperation with the media (as much 71%), while only 8% were not satisfied with this cooperation. As expected, the differentiation between the non-political and political CSOs is important: environmentalists were most satisfied and those from the areas of education and research are most dissatisfied.

Two thirds of CSOs cooperated with the local media; every tenth did so with the national ones, while only a quarter of them (23%) cooperated with both. CSOs that offer social services were, from a comparative perspective, most satisfied with their cooperation with local media.

The existence of better relations with local media – and consequently a better CSO opinion of them in comparison with the national ones – is visible from the fact that local media is the place where most CSOs promote their work – in almost two thirds of cases. The second most important channel for promotion is – an informal way of spreading information, 38% of promotion is done through CSO websites, 29% through social media, while only 21% through national media outlets.

Very important for the topic of this section is the conclusion of the 2011 survey, according to which less than half (48%) of CSOs think that media understand the significance and the role of the civic sector. At the same time, the interviewed CSO representatives admit that they need to be educated more about modern media, too.

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[23] Građanske inicijative, *Procena stanja u sektoru organizacija civilnog društva (OCD) u Srbiji*, septembar, 2011.

Civil society representatives in the media regulating agencies

In most democratic countries today laws require that civil society representatives have to participate in the councils of independent bodies that regulate the work of electronic media. Serbia is no exception to this trend so the (Serbian) Regulatory body for electronic media (REM) is obliged to have two civil society representatives. They have to be appointed by the Serbian CSOs.

In this way the civil society would be ideally put in a position to have its share of oversight over the work of media public services. This would include taking part in decision-making on very important and sensitive areas, including the registration of electronic media, and the estimation of whether public interest is being served or not in their work.

All members of the REM Council are elected by the Serbian Assembly, but different stakeholders that are represented in the Council – civil society included - are the ones who are entitled to suggest candidates for these positions. As in similar situations in other countries, the mentioned appointments are usually closely followed in the Serbian public, too. The election of new Council members at the end of 2015 caused a lot of friction between the Government on one side and CSOs, independent media and some opposition parties on the other. The Government did its best to prevent the official appointment of civil society candidates by the Assembly's Committee on Culture and Media. Representatives of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party in the Committee tried to twist the rules in order to prevent the proposal of official candidates to reach the Assembly. The same was done in the case of the candidate proposed by the Assembly of Vojvodina. The result of this blockade – which directly violated the Law on electronic media, as well as the Assembly's Rules of Conduct – was a months-long delay in completion of the REM Council, with three out of nine members lacking without proper explanation.

This was harshly criticized by the media and civil society organizations from Serbia and abroad, but it didn't change much. Fifty five Serbian CSOs and media organizations sent an open letter to the Serbian Government on 25 March 2016, accusing it for gross violations of the rule of law in the media sphere, not only in this but also in many other cases that included unlawful subsidies to the media outlets that support the Government, particularly through the local-based financing of media within the so-called project-based applications.[24] CSOs warned the Government that such behavior would

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[24]   http://www.gradjanske.org/otvoreno-pismo-vladi-srbije-organizacija-civilnog-drustva-vlast-da-prestane-sa-ugrozavanjem-vladavine-prava-u-sferi-javnog-informisanja/

certainly not contribute to the expected opening of the negotiating Chapter No. 23 with the EU that deals specifically with the rule of law.

The Government was not ready to offer any concessions. However, at the end of July 2016, the call for applications for one REM Council candidate from Vojvodina was released, only because the Government in Vojvodina was changed in the meantime, following elections in April 2016. In contrast to the previous state of affairs, when the opposition Democratic Party had the Parliamentary majority and the Government in this Serbian autonomous province, new elections brought the Serbian Progressive Party into power there, too.

The described affair shows clearly at least two things. Firstly, it shows that control of the media is of truly exceptional importance for the incumbent Serbian power holders. They don't seem to be ready to back down here and endanger the monopoly over information they've had ever since they took power in Serbia, at least in the mainstream media. Secondly, this was also a perfect example of the high level of politicization of the Serbian media space in which genuine information warfare is being waged, and where not a single element is irrelevant, and not a single battle can be lost.

Serbian media space has been for sure politicized even before the described REM Council affair, including the times in which Vucic's opponents from today's opposition were in power. It went without saying even then that the election of the REM Council was extremely important and the leading political parties took great care of getting the appropriate number of the representatives of each important political force, in harmony with the results of elections. In Serbia, this has always led to a situation in which public interest was deliberately – and almost by definition - replaced with the interests of parties that won elections. Within such a context, it was only natural to have some politicians and media owners united around the same cause, lucrative in the political or economic sense.

Vucic's rule took this trend to the extreme, eliminating all other possible coalitions between political and media actors, except the one and only that he is in charge of. This new turn is additionally significant because of the effective disappearance of the opposition under his rule. Left without an opposition, Serbian society cannot expect the rules of check and balances to work and thus the only force capable to counter the rising absolutist rule in the country are the media and the civil society. That's why both independent media and civil society have got an even greater political weight, and this is why the two actors are so closely connected.

Media, civil society, and public participation

In this concluding section of the paper, we'll take a brief look at organizations that focus on freedom of expression, media freedoms and different aspects of the rule of law. As they connect media and civil society in many ways, their position and significance in any given society are important indicators of the challenges that both media and civil society are faced with individually. The findings will lead us then to a more general discussion about the possibilities for citizens' participation, particularly from the perspective of the media and civil society activism.

With the help of the media it controls, the incumbent Serbian regime has been very ambitious in its efforts to discredit all influential CSOs that deal at the same time with media freedoms and the rule of law. Four of them have in the last year become targets of particularly fierce attacks: the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), the Network for Investigating Crime and Corruption (KRIK), Serbia's Centre for Investigative Journalism (CINS) and - less an organization and more a social movement - "Ne davimo Beograd" (Let's not drown Belgrade)[25]. The first three came under a coordinated attack in late 2015 and were labelled as a dangerous "fifth column" that was supposedly constantly working with the aim of overthrowing Prime Minister Vucic and his Government. The key "proof" of many alleged actions they were engaged in was foreign funding for the projects they worked on. The CSOs in question were in fact only discovering unpleasant details of a number of unlawful activities of the Government or its key people. These included the uncovering of secret elements of government contracts, like the one on de-watering the coal mine following big floods in Serbia in the spring of 2014, or publicly unveiling data on personal properties of the Serbian Prime Minister's family. The Government showed clearly that it was equally painfully hurt by stories covering plagiarism done by some of the key people in Vucic's entourage. The unveiling of the secret purchase of apartments in Bulgaria by one of them, the mayor of Belgrade, triggered fierce reactions by power holders and their media, too.

The social movement "Let's not drown Belgrade" became the target of a similar smear campaign because it revealed unlawful actions of the Serbian Government and the Belgrade City Council connected with the construction of the business and residential complex Belgrade Waterfront. The pressure on the movement went up in parallel with the popularity it was getting after April 2016. During the spring and summer, the movement organized a number of protests, with ever more participants, because of the lack of police

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[25] See http://birn.eu.com/en/page/birn-under-fire

intervention against an illegal action of destruction of homes and businesses in the vicinity of the Belgrade Waterfront.[26]

One should note that campaigns against independent CSOs and media do not end with one or more official statements of a Government ministry or of a Prime Minister's Party. On the contrary, campaigns usually last for days, and are often initiated by the tabloid Informer. Its set of accusations and the wording is then repeated countless times in the privately owned TV "empire" Pink and in various other printed and electronic media outlets across the country. Informer's editor-in-chief always acted as a special guest on TV Pink's programs in those days in order to emphasize and make people remember the accusations made of blatant lies or equally dangerous and well-packaged half-truths. He often returns the favor by quoting in length TV Pink's contributions of a similar kind. This cooperation works fine, because it looks as if one actor in this game, pretending to pursue independent investigative journalism, gets to uncover a plot against Vucic. The other actor then reports on the alleged big revelation its partner made, and everything seems to be in harmony with the ways in which media are supposed to work within a democratic society. But in fact, nothing is what it seems: media controlled by the Government are its propaganda service and the whole media space instead of being open and run by professional standards is highly politicized and confrontational. Public space is thus naturally turned into a kind of a war front between the power holders and their media on one side and independent media, CSOs and a feeble political opposition on the other.

Within such a context, citizens' possibilities for political participation are radically diminished, as they are expected to join one or the other side in the battle. Leaning towards the Government side is of course more comfortable and without risks and requires almost no active engagement at all, except on elections. Choosing the other side, however, requires activism that comes together with some potential risk. This is why most Serbian citizens, impoverished and disappointed by the post-communist transition, choose the first option, which is reflected in the high popularity of the incumbent Government and its leader.

Regardless of the way in which social activism is being measured it is at present very low in Serbia, but with some signs indicating its modest growth. According to the Government's Office for cooperation with civil society, the participation of citizens in debates on draft laws is extremely low. In 2014 public debates were organized for only 10% of draft laws, and CSOs were

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[26] See http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/25-000-attend-savamala-demolitions-protest-in-belgrade-06-25-2016

included in only 20% of working and expert groups that were in charge of drafting the laws.[27] Examples of much higher CSO engagement do exist but are rare. In addition to the already mentioned case of their oversight of the negotiations with the EU, one should also mention that a coalition of 115 CSOs successfully lobbied for the change of tax laws at the end of 2015: contrary to the previous regulations, corporate donors have now the same type of tax exempts for both the state bodies and for CSOs.

A survey done by CRTA in 2015 noticed that citizens are a little more ready to engage in the solution of local problems. The support for this went up from 7% of citizens in 2014 to 12% a year later. Twenty-two percent of citizens also believe – in equally modest but still an encouraging way – that by participating in the work of CSOs they can contribute to social changes. It's interesting to note that this more direct and visible type of activism through CSOs is preferable from the citizens' standpoint than other types of activism. Internet activism is chosen as the best way by 18% of respondents, engagement through independent regulatory bodies by 16%, or through members of parliament by 19%. The most encouraging finding is that citizens have now more trust in protest and demonstrations (22%) as the way for their engagement than before.

It remains to be seen whether this growth in the desire for social activism will continue, particularly because the incumbent Serbian regime seems to have passed the peak of its popularity. A higher level of citizens' engagement does not, however, translate immediately into higher levels of democracy that has been in retreat lately not only in Serbia and in the Balkans, but throughout the whole world, as well.

Conclusions

Our overview of the media and the civil society landscapes showed that both scenes are at first sight quite big, but also internally divided, in flux and often chaotic, and without respectable capacities that could guarantee their long-time sustainability. Both sectors are also highly politicized, as is the whole public sphere in today's Serbia, which reduces possibilities for their work.

The images that civil society and media have of each other are diversified and depend on the side they choose in politically polarized and confrontational Serbia, torn between the power-hungry Government and powerless citizens. The paper showed that there are many ways and areas in which cooperation between civil society and media could be implemented and improved. Civil

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[27] *Nacionalna strategija za stvaranje podsticajnog okruženja za razvoj civilnog društva u Republici Srbiji za period 2015-2019. godine*, nacrt, Beograd, 2015.

society and media should be also capable of motivating much higher political participation and more generally higher social activism.

Serbia's biggest specific is that in the absence of the political opposition at this moment independent media and civil society have remained the only social actors that can hold the Government accountable, and try to keep its work within constitutional and legal boundaries. It's a huge task that these actors cannot and should not perform alone, without the political parties. They should, however, reject to become fully politicized, and try to remain the society's conscious and key controlling factor that cares for the public interest.