



BULGARIA

MEDIA OWNERSHIP IN A "CAPTURED STATE"

BULGARIA: MEDIA OWNERSHIP IN A “CAPTURED STATE”

Report on the June 2018 joint fact-finding mission

Content

Introduction	3
Focus: Media Ownership	4
Influence of Advertisers on Media	6
Related issues	11
Functioning institutions vs. impunity	12
(Self)-Censorship	13
Lack of trust and media illiteracy	16
Conclusion and recommendations	18
Methodology	20
List of meetings/interviewees:	21
Sources	22

Members of the Delegation:

Nora Wehofsits, ECPMF
 Francesco Martino, OBCT (also representing Oliver Vujovic, South East Europe Media Organisation – SEEMO)

Mission partner:

Vesselin Dimitrov, Forbes Bulgaria, ECPMF founding member

Interpreter:

Teodora Angelova

Layout:

Andreas Lamm – ECPMF



EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR
 PRESS & MEDIA
 FREEDOM



Project of the Peace Bell
 Foundation, promoted by
 the Trentino Forum for
 Peace and Human Rights

Provincia autonoma di Trento

S · E · E · M · O



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
 Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Front page-picture: Wall painting in the building of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists. Photo: ECPMF

Introduction

In June 2018, during the last week of Bulgaria's rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) carried out a fact-finding mission in Sofia, along with its partner Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso - Transeuropa (OBCT). Such fact-finding missions are sent to troubled areas in Europe where media freedom violations are occurring.

The ECPMF and its network were in a good position to investigate the media landscape in Bulgaria. For one, the International Press Institute (IPI) and South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), both ECPMF partners, are particularly familiar with the regional structures. Also of great help were the personal contacts to Bulgarian media workers through one of ECPMF's founding members and the ECPMF's Journalists-in-Residence programme.

Bulgaria has built up a highly worrisome record of freedom of speech and media violations. The Balkan country fails to meet European standards regarding the European Charter on Freedom of the Press, with recent reports dubbing it one of the least free among the EU's 28 member states. "As a whole, the media situation is deteriorating," attests the IREX Media Sustainability Index 2018.¹

The Reporters without Borders Index actually ranks Bulgaria the lowest in the EU for press and media freedom: 111 out of 180 countries worldwide.² Also, the United States-funded Freedom House categorises the country as only "partly free", pointing out how the legal environment is undermined by political and economic elites.³



Wall painting in the building of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists.

Photo: ECPMF

1 "Media Sustainability Index 2018. Bulgaria.", IREX (2018), p.29ff: <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-full.pdf>

2 Corruption and collusion between media, politicians, and oligarchs is widespread. RSF Report Bulgaria (2018): <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>

3 "Freedom House Press Freedom Report Bulgaria, 2018", Freedom House (2018): <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/bulgaria>

Focus: Media Ownership

In light of this scenario, the fact-finding mission selected as its focus Bulgaria's media ownership structures and their implications for media freedom in the country. Several studies had already stressed the fact that media ownership concentration and a lack of media ownership transparency are presently the main challenges for media freedom in Bulgaria. For instance, the CMPF Media Pluralism Report 2018 sees a high risk for media pluralism, primarily in the areas of "Market Plurality" and "Political Independence"; it particularly refers to horizontal media ownership concentration (96%), the cross-media concentration of ownership as well as competition enforcement (88%), and commercial and owners' influence over editorial content (92%). In fact, state regulation of resources and support to the media sector scores the highest among all risk indicators (97%). Another high-risk area the report identified was the rate of independence versus control over media outlets (75%).⁴

A questionnaire sent to experts on the ground prior to the fact-finding mission, in May 2018 (see: Methodology), also revealed media ownership to be one of the most pressing issues in Bulgaria.

Most media in Bulgaria are in the hands of a few oligarchs. Many print and online outlets are owned and funded by publishers who also control other businesses. Delyan Peevski, a Member of Parliament with allegedly close ties to other politicians and businesses in the country, officially owns six newspapers – including "Telegraph", the highest-selling tabloid in Bulgaria; the national newspapers "Monitor", "Politika"

and "Meridian Match"; and shares in the local newspaper "Borba", from the Telegraph Media Group (formerly the New Bulgaria Media Group, NBMG). According to media analysts, however, Peevski indirectly controls a much larger share of Bulgaria's print media (or up to 80% of the market).

According to experts, Peevski also controls a large share of the newspaper distribution system (being involved in the ownership of the company behind the largest distribution network), which carries the risk of dissemination of the media being stopped. In March 2017, for example, the editors of the satiric newspaper "Pras Press" accused the Natsionalna Distributsiya distribution company – which is linked to Peevski – of having limited the circulation of their first issue for political reasons.⁵ The distributors' influence can also serve to determine if certain papers should be circulated, or if shops should sell them.⁶

In April 2018, Peevski made public his intention to sell 50% of the Telegraph Media Group to New Image Bulgaria Ltd., a subsidiary of the American New Image. But later on in October, Peevski stepped back from the deal, blaming the delay of the necessary approval by the Competition Protection Commission as the main reason. He then announced the creation of a new "Telegraph foundation", devoted to "developing the media market, raising professional standards and morale among the journalist community and fighting fake news". The new foundation should fully take over the Telegraph Media Group, while Peevski himself

4 "CMPF Media Pluralism Report Bulgaria 2017", CMPF (2018): cmpf.eu.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Bulgaria_MPM2017_country-report.pdf

5 "Bulgaria's Charlie Hebdo' Blocked From News Stands", Balkan Insight, (07.03.2017): <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/new-satirical-newspaper-in-bulgaria-censored-publishers-say-03-06-2017>

6 "Curbing Media, Crippling Debate. Soft censorship in Bulgaria", WAN IFRA/CIMA/SEEMO, (2016): <http://www.seemo.org/assets/pdf/soft-censorship-bulgaria.pdf>



Delegates interview/ Union of Bulgarian Journalists in Sofia.

Photo: ECPMF

would exclusively “provide financial support to the foundation in order to reach its goals.”⁷

Other Bulgarian media groups are owned by business people with diversified interests. Among them are Ivo Prokopiev (“Ekonomedia” group), Ognyan Donev (“Club Z”), and Sasho Donchev (“Sega”). Online media outlets such as “Mediapool”, “Pod Tepeto” and “Offnews” are owned by journalists, and substantially supported by external NGOs and foundation funding (e.g. America for Bulgaria). Meanwhile, public TV and public radio are directly linked to the state. “The public service media serves the interests of the political power”, says one of the fact-finding mission interviewees.

In the 1990s, when Bulgaria liberalised its information market, press, TV, and radio outlets were purchased by private actors. Among them were several foreign companies, such as the German Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (WAZ), which in 1997 bought the then- major dailies “24 Chasa” and “Trud.”⁸ When the economic environment for the media started deteriorating in 2008, due to the financial crisis – as stressed by several of the interviewees – big international groups gradually started withdrawing from Bulgaria, leaving its market to smaller cross-border owners.

WAZ, for example, sold its newspapers in 2010, followed by the Swedish media groups Bonnier (2011) and Sanoma Magazines (2013). Parallel to

7 “Peevski transfers his media related bussiness to a foundation, but will keep on support it financially” (“Пеевски прехвърля медийния си бизнес на фондация, но ще помага материално”) Dnevnik.bg, (10.10.2018): https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/10/10/3325331_peekvski_prehvurlia_mediiniia_si_biznes_na_fondaciia_no/

8 <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Dossier-Freedom-of-the-press-in-Bulgaria-187405>

the withdrawal of foreign investors, the market was shifting among publishers with Bulgarian capital. The appearance of politically motivated owners who perceived the media as a tool for impact, control and public influence, in contrast to business-oriented investors, can be observed.⁹

This trend led to the visible deterioration of the media environment and freedom of the press in Bulgaria. A 2016 report pointed out that the crisis had a strong impact on the profits of most private media, leading also to increased dependency on government funding.¹⁰

The two biggest private broadcasters (NOVA TV and BTV) are also foreign-owned. In February 2018, Czech businessman Peter Kellner, one of

the richest in Central-Eastern Europe, made an attempt at buying NOVA TV, until then owned by the Swedish group NTG. The deal, however, was first delayed, and then annulled by the Competition Protection Commission. Despite being privately owned, such broadcasters receive, via advertising, money from the national government as well as lottery and gambling proceeds.

Even when a media outlet is foreign-owned, it can still depend on local political structures and be vulnerable to external political and/or economic pressure (e.g. through advertisement, see below). Interviewees portrayed to the fact-finding mission the interests of foreign media owners as also business-driven: "They are not interested in quality journalism".

Influence of Advertisers on Media

Overall, advertisers have applied disruptive pressure on Bulgarian media in recent years. According to an AEJ report from 2015, 60.8% of the journalists asked claimed they had been subject to pressure from their media's advertisers.¹¹ Media owners tend to have shares in advertisers' companies, which puts pressure on editorial content. Freedom House, for one, characterises Bulgaria as having many outlets that are beholden to major advertisers.¹² As the CMPF reports, the government does not require the prevention of

advertiser influence over content, with "no measures stipulating that the exercise of the journalistic profession is incompatible with activities in the field of advertising."¹³

As of yet, state financing is counter-productive to this press freedom objective.¹⁴ The only state fund works as an advertisement tool that rewards companies' friendliness towards the government.¹⁵ This can create an opportunity cost for media outlets that oppose government interests.

9 "The Media freedom White Paper", Union of Publishers in Bulgaria (2018): https://www.enpa.eu/sites/default/files/in-line-files/White_Paper_ENG%20%28004%29_0.pdf

10 "Curbing Media, Crippling Debate. Soft censorship in Bulgaria", WAN IFRA/CIMA/SEEMO, (2016): <http://www.seemo.org/assets/pdf/soft-censorship-bulgaria.pdf>

11 "CMPF Media Pluralism Report Bulgaria 2016", CMPF (2017): <http://cmpf.eu.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/bulgaria/>

12 "Freedom House Press Freedom Report Bulgaria, 2018", Freedom House (2018): <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/bulgaria>

13 "CMPF Media Pluralism Report Bulgaria 2016", CMPF (2017): <http://cmpf.eu.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/bulgaria/>

14 Ibid.

15 "A comparative analysis of media freedom and pluralism in the EU Member States." Directorate general for internal policies. LIBE (2016): [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571376/IPOL_STU\(2016\)571376_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571376/IPOL_STU(2016)571376_EN.pdf)

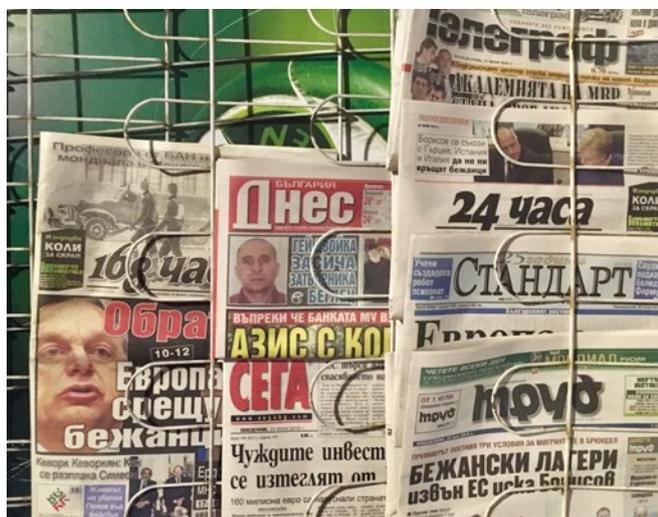
As for political pressure on big media, it may be exerted either directly (through their owners) or indirectly (through control by advertisers).

In addition, as previously suggested, even if a media outlet has foreign owners, there is still a risk of political influence and censorship – also through advertisement. “Advertisers are told not to advertise in certain media”, one interviewee said during the fact-finding mission. The mission delegates also interviewed an investigative journalist who had decided to withdraw from covering national news, as there was too much control and pressure on the reporting (see Censorship).

“In the end it’s all about the cash flow and how this is channeled”, remarks an investigative journalist working for a media outlet owned by Prokopiev. So ownership seems not to be the only problematic element, as editorial policy itself risks being influenced by the cash flow in general; taxes, advertisement, funding distribution, etc. are all sources of political and economic pressure.

Another interviewee dubs the shrinking and concentrated advertisement market in Bulgaria a “broken market”, in which distribution is not transparent. The lack of transparency in the advertising market is also described in reports.¹⁶ Nevertheless, “our editorial department is not linked to the advertisement department,” counters our interviewee from a private TV channel. “There were attempts at political interference, but they were not successful”.

However, especially in regional settings, local media is largely dependent on financing by municipalities and local owners. A 2015 investigation



Newspapers in Bulgaria.

Photo: ECPMF

by Spas Spasov, the Varna correspondent for “Dnevnik” and “Kapital”, showed that between 2013 and 2015 municipalities in Bulgaria spent at least 2.7 million leva (around 1.5 million Euros) of their own or EU funds on local newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations. These funds are often absolutely vital to the very existence of local media. Sometimes municipalities even directly pay the salaries of journalists tasked with monitoring the activities of the local administration, which represents an obvious conflict of interest.¹⁷ “In such an environment, PR takes often the place of journalism”, says an interviewee, describing the situation as especially difficult for investigative journalists in the regions. “The media atmosphere outside Sofia is toxic”.

Several interviewees of the fact-finding mission described the government of Bulgaria as one of the biggest media advertisers, using state budget money. In addition, the state is able to use a powerful direct financial tool for controlling

16 “Media Sustainability Index 2018. Bulgaria.”, IREX (2018), p.39: <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-full.pdf>

17 “Bulgaria, where the local press can be bought for cheap”, ОБСТ, (06.02.2017): <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Bulgaria-where-the-local-press-can-be-bought-for-cheap-177272>

the media: the European communications money spent on advertising European funds.¹⁸

In other words, the government plays a significant role in funding private media via the distribution of EU funds.¹⁹ Such distribution – favourable to media that are loyal or beneficial to the government – was seen by almost all interviewees as highly problematic, with a risk of political interference. "... there is no mechanism in place to increase the transparency on how EU funds are distributed", says one journalist. For instance, according to a SEEMO-led report²⁰, in the 2007-14 period, over 36 million Euros were allocated, mainly to five national TV stations and three radio stations, for informing the public about the results of the EU-funded Rural Development Programme.

In 2013, Miroslav Naydenov, the former Minister of Agriculture in Bulgaria, was intercepted²¹ while speaking to Boyko Borisov (the country's current Prime Minister) and to Nickolay Kokinov (the Attorney General of Sofia). In the conversation, leaked to the website "Afera.bg,"²² Naydenov admitted that public tenders had been biased in favour of media that agreed to unwritten conditions, and that the media were expected not to be critical of anyone who gave them money.²³

In the first half of 2018, Bulgaria held its first rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. Within this framework, the country also

received advertising money specifically allocated for the presidency. But interviewees told the fact-finding mission delegates on the ground that this money had only been supplied to three media outlets, two of which were described as being extremely loyal to the government and, additionally, anti-European. According to the current Bulgarian legislation, media can get public money with direct contracts, without participating in public tenders. Buying media complaisance with public money and making media dependent on such distribution of public funds would lead to a vicious circle.

"The [Bulgarian] government practices are legitimised by foreign politicians when we need leverage, especially from the Council of Europe and EU institutions," a supporter of independent media in Bulgaria has affirmed. The Bulgarian presidency of the Council of the EU was therefore largely seen as a missed opportunity, as it strengthened the government. Also, "Prime Minister Borisov did all his best to put his hand on all Bulgarian mainstream media, to avoid any negative coverage about him," the delegates were told.

Legal framework

Freedom of speech and media freedom are guaranteed by law in Bulgaria, granted by the 1991 constitution.²⁴ Article 39 of the Bulgarian Constitution states that everybody is free to

18 "New RSF report on obstacles to investigative journalism in Bulgaria", Reporters without Borders (RSF) (2018): <https://rsf.org/en/reports/new-rsf-report-obstacles-investigative-journalism-bulgaria>

19 "Media Sustainability Index 2018. Bulgaria.", IREX (2018), p.38: <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-full.pdf>

20 http://www.wan-ifra.org/sites/default/files/field_article_file/SC%20Bulgaria%20final%202016%20%282%29.pdf

21 Bulgaria: The Age of the Oligarchs. Resource Centre (July 2014) <https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/Publications/Reports/Bulgaria-The-Age-of-the-Oligarchs>

22 Afera.bg leak (2013): afera.bg/ето-ги-скандалните-записи-на-бойко-бор.html

23 "The Age of the Oligarchs: How a group of political and economic magnates have taken control of Bulgaria" Stefan Antonov (2013): <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/The%2520Age%2520of%2520Oligarchs.pdf>

24 Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (accessed 11/2018) www.parliament.bg/en/const

express and distribute her or his opinion by any means. Article 40 declares mass media free of state control and not subject to censorship. Yet, the legal framework protecting media freedom and media pluralism in the country is described as insufficient, or at least insufficiently implemented.²⁵ While in most cases the legal framework introduces necessary standards, they are frequently not effectively implemented in practice.²⁶ As stressed by a media expert interviewed, this happens also through a lack of political will.

For example, the existing laws against political interference in the media do not explicitly forbid politicians – such as the aforementioned Peevski) – from directly owning outlets. Meanwhile, Bulgarian legislation does not protect independent editorial policies, while competition law only inadequately regulates the media ownership concentration in the country. A much-needed law on access to information was approved in Bulgaria in 2000, providing protection to sources as a crucial part of investigative journalism; but unfortunately, it appears that its provisions are not being consistently applied in the country.²⁷

"The media regulator is neither impartial nor independent", says a media law expert, interviewed during the mission. "There is a lack of provisions for the competition in the media sector; there are no specific instruments/regulations in place."

Self-regulatory mechanisms reflect a deep division in Bulgarian media. While self-regulation should be implemented through the Ethical Code of Journalists, polarisation among the largest private groups operating within the country's

information sector severely impairs the capacity of self-regulating mechanisms for Bulgarian journalists. In 2014, the creation of an alternative ethical code challenged the one gathered by the Union of the Editors in Bulgaria. The older code is still in force, while the newer one is being followed by the members of the Bulgarian Media Union, formed around the outlets controlled by Delyan Peevski. Hence, presently there are two competing ethical codes for Bulgarian media, with neither being considered particularly effective.²⁸

Draft law on media ownership transparency

Media ownership transparency directly intersects with political and business interference. In 2010, after years of public pressure, Bulgaria's parliament passed a law that compels every publishing house to point out who is its real owner. This information must be indicated by every newspaper, on the first page of the first issue printed every year. But despite these measures, Bulgarian readers are still largely unable to understand whose economic or political interests stand behind a given publication.²⁹

In February 2018, several MPs from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, including Delyan Peevski, submitted a draft law on the disclosure of the real owners and external financing of media outlets other than advertising. MPs claim the aim was to make funding of media organisations more transparent. It should be noted that the Union of Bulgarian Journalists was not asked for its expertise.

25 <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Dossier-Freedom-of-the-press-in-Bulgaria-187405>

26 "CMPF Media Pluralism Report Bulgaria 2017", CMPF (2018): cmpf.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Bulgaria_MPM2017_country-report.pdf

27 *ibid.*

28 "Media Sustainability Index 2018. Bulgaria.", IREX (2018), p.34: <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-full.pdf>

29 <http://printmediareport.aej-bulgaria.org/light/>

According to the draft law, print, electronic and online media outlets are now obliged to provide information about their current owner on their website, and state any funding received during the previous calendar year, its size and purpose. In this first draft, however, the outlets did not have to disclose information on bank loans, advertising revenues or communication contracts from European funds used for hidden financing; this bore a clear risk of creating two categories of media, putting additional pressure on media outlets that rely on foreign grants and donations to stay independent.³⁰

The fact-finding mission delegation asked all its interviewees about their perception of the draft bill, getting the impression that it was seen as a "farce", "hypocritical", and clearly as a tool to harm Peevski's opponents. Moreover, it was seen as involving a strong conflict of interest, as media owner Peevski is himself an MP. There seem to be systematic cases of conflict of interest among owners of media outlets and the ruling parties, partisan groups and politicians, affecting both national and local media in Bulgaria.³¹

Meanwhile, the representative of the Telegraph Media group, owned by Delyan Peevski, rather sees misinformation, as well as a lack of transparency and of self-regulation, as the most pressing issues. Interviewed by the delegates, the representative pointed out that the Telegraph Media Group would not be a monopolist and is under no political pressure. Also, the conflict of Peevski being an MP is not seen here, as "he has the right to propose legislation in his own sector."

After the mission, in November 2018, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted the law in its second reading.³² Thanks to strong public pressure – especially the one exerted by public opinion and professional organisations – many of the most controversial elements were dropped in the law's second and final reading. Some aspects, though, remain problematic.

On the one hand, rather than being entrusted to the independent Council for Electronic Media, control over the regularity of declarations of media ownership is held instead by the Ministry of Culture, which is part of the executive power. On the other hand, many experts have criticised the disproportionately high fines foreseen by the law (ten to 15 thousand leva, increased to 20 to 30 thousand leva in case of a repeat offence), which could effectively be used to deter dissent or restrict freedom of the press. Especially smaller media, which rely on donations or crowdfunding (like the online outlet Bivol.bg, for example), could get into deep trouble, since they are requested to declare every single donation they receive, even the smallest ones, so as not to incur the applicable penalties.

Careful monitoring of the new law's actual implementation is needed, in order to assess its capacity to secure a higher degree of transparency in media ownership in Bulgaria.

30 Index on Censorship: "Violence corruption and censorship: The realities of being a journalist in Bulgaria (September 2018): <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/category/europe-central-asia/bulgaria/>

31 "CMPF Media Pluralism Report Bulgaria 2017", CMPF (2018): cmpf.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Bulgaria_MPM2017_country-report.pdf

32 Законът на Пеевски за медиите безпрепятствено мина през медийната комисия (zakonut na peevski za mediate bezprepiatstveno mina) (Capital.bg 25.10.2018) https://www.capital.bg/biznes/media_i_reklama/2018/10/25/3333703_zakonut_na_peevski_z_a_mediite_bezprepiatstveno_mina/

Related issues

Corruption

Several interviewees claim that since Bulgaria became a EU member state, the pressure on upholding freedom of expression has decreased. Despite the evident positive impact of European Union membership on the country's economic growth and infrastructure modernisation, the same cannot be said for its media freedom landscape. This, in combination with unfinished reforms, is described as having paved the way for an increase in corruption and, therefore, also in pressure on the media. This problematic situation was described in several interviews as a symptom of the system not being just, inter alia due to corruption: "It's a market in tatters. The public institutions need reform." Transparency International has ranked Bulgaria 71 out of 180 countries, highlighting the need for more anti-corruption progress as well as civil engagement.³³

Since the collapse of the CCB in 2014, writing articles that criticise the banking sector has apparently become a punishable offence. In January 2015, the Financial Supervision Committee fined Alpiko Publishing, owner of "Zov News," for an article that criticised the stability of the banking sector.³⁴

These fines and the use of legal proceedings to silence dissent are threatening the media landscape. Ivo Prokopiev, publisher of Capital.bg and Dnevnik.bg – and one of Delyan Peevski's main opponents – has been prosecuted for allegedly provoking financial instability with a speech. Though later rejected by the courts in Bulgaria, this accusation preceded an unrelated investigation against the media owner. As a result, the authorities have seized 100% of Prokopiev's controlling stake in his publications. His total assets have been frozen.³⁵

On 26. October 2018 (after the fact-finding mission), Bulgarian prosecutors announced their intention to also take Prokopiev to court on money laundering charges, in connection with the sale of one of his companies to a German group. On this occasion, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) once again called on Bulgarian authorities to stop harassing the Economedica group.³⁶ As one of the interviewees had explained to the mission delegates, Economedica "gets tax bills because its media reports critically on the government and is funded by an external foundation, America for Bulgaria."

33 Transparency International. Bulgaria (2018) <https://www.transparency.org/country/BGR>

34 "The State of Regional Media in Bulgaria", Daniel Penev (2016): http://www.fmd.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/regional-media-in-bulgaria-_mdf_-daniel-penev.pdf

35 "Bulgaria freezes assets of independent media publisher." Reuters (12.12. 2017) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-freeze-media/bulgaria-freezes-assets-of-independent-media-publisher-idUSKBN1E62gD>

36 "Bulgaria harasses independent media group again." RSF (08.11.2018) <https://rsf.org/en/news/bulgaria-harasses-independent-media-group-again>

Functioning institutions vs. impunity

Several interviewees describe Bulgaria as a “captured state”, lacking rule of law as well as functioning institutions. The judiciary, in particular, was described as not functioning independently. More than ten years after joining the EU (2007), Bulgaria is still being submitted to the Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification (CVM) – specifically to address benchmarks in areas of judicial reform (together with the fight against corruption and organised crime).

This would result in a vicious circle, as it is related to the environment for the media.

Overall, media workers have been justified in requesting an independent judiciary service to review actions taken by the Prosecution Office. Recent legal amendments have looked to increase the Prosecution Office’s power; one of them allows for the opportunity to continue court proceedings when the defence attorney is absent.³⁷

Three different independent reports – courtesy of a group of EU-based prosecutors, the European Commission (as part of the Mechanism for Co-operation and Verification), and the Venice Commission – have all noted that there is no review system which can hold the Prosecution Office in Bulgaria accountable.^{38,39,40}

Bivol.bg, one of the few independent investiga-

tive online media outlets (funded, on its limits, by voluntary donations, rather than advertisements) accused Peevski of having bribed for the appointment of the Prosecutor General⁴¹, in order to preserve the monopolist’s business and political interests. Also according to Bivol, the Prosecution Office in Bulgaria is supposed to have issued several charges against Peevski’s competitors. In addition, Freedom House reported in 2016 that the prosecutions for using offshore tax havens are believed to have preserved Peevski’s companies.⁴²

The threat of prosecution, at the same time, may scare independent journalists off investigating specific topics. Civil and penal procedures are described as often being used by state officials to pressure as well as financially exhaust journalists (see self-censorship).⁴³

“It is nearly impossible to survive as an independent investigative media outlet in this situation”, says one of the interviewees.

Smear campaigns – as a method for putting pressure on journalists and publishers – seem to be very common. Investigative journalists told the mission delegates that whenever there is an important investigation or corruption is revealed, the journalists and publishers are immediately put under severe pressure and targeted with smear campaigns.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Executive Summary “EU Report Analyzing Bulgaria’s Prosecution Service Wants to See Improved Criminal Procedure” 2016 <http://www.mjs.bg/Files/Executive%20Summary%20Final%20Report%20BG%2015122016.pdf>

³⁹ Commission Staff Working Document Bulgaria: Technical Report. European Commission (2017) https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/comm-2017-700_en.pdf

⁴⁰ “Bulgaria - Opinion on the Judicial System Act, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 112th Plenary Session”, Council of Europe/Venice Commission, (2017): [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2017\)018-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2017)018-e)

⁴¹ “Letter to the US embassy exposes “Bulgartabac” scheme”, bivol.bg (07.07. 2015): <https://bivol.bg/en/letter-to-the-us-embassy-exposes-bulgartabac-scheme-featuring-boyko-borisov-ahmed-dogan-and-delyan-peeovski.html>

⁴² “Freedom House Press Freedom Report Bulgaria, 2018”, Freedom House (2018): <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2018/bulgaria>

⁴³ “New RSF report on obstacles to investigative journalism in Bulgaria”, Reporters without Borders (RSF) (2018): <https://rsf.org/en/reports/new-rsf-report-obstacles-investigative-journalism-bulgaria>

Vice versa, though, the cases brought to surface by journalistic investigations are often not investigated by the authorities, but left to impunity. "This is a very frustrating and discouraging reality, and people don't even bother", an interviewee said.

In the delicate field of investigative journalism, according to a RSF report, the situation in Bulgaria is a living paradox: On paper, current legislation makes the country "a good place for investiga-

tive journalism", thanks to operational and cheap public registers, online tracking of public procurements, and the presence of a Freedom of Information Act, defined as "one of the best crafted transparency acts in Europe." Working on the field, though, investigative journalists are highly likely to hit a wall of silence, facing authorities with "eyes wide shut", or worse: being followed, intimidated, discouraged via smear campaigns, and labelled "Enemy of the State."⁴⁴

(Self)-Censorship

In Bulgaria, (self-)censorship is a major problem, even in "quality journalism" media outlets, according to the majority of the interviewees.

Many journalists in the country fear losing their jobs, in a market where self-censorship becomes necessary for economic survival.⁴⁵ According to an AEJ report from 2017, 26% of journalists asked in a survey admit that they self-censor their articles, while the media outlet owners actively restrict criticism towards the government or person being investigated.⁴⁶

Self-censorship can be described as a symptom of Bulgaria's low media freedom ranking, coupled with issues of media ownership. As interviewees repeatedly stressed, the country's lack of unbiased reporting and of quality journalism

can be attributed to a number of factors; these include threats to journalists, a media ownership structure characterised by interwoven business and political interests, as well as the insufficient implementation of existing constitutional protections and media legislation related to freedom of speech and expression. "The general bad working conditions of journalists influence censorship as well," says a representative of the journalists' union.

Four major reports on Bulgaria describe authorities as discouraging of a fair environment for journalists.^{47, 48, 49, 50} Self-censorship therefore seems to be systemically ingrained in the media landscape, even in media operating under a more independent and professional editorial ethos.⁵¹

44 Mission So Possible: Investigative Journalism in Bulgaria. RSF (2018) https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/investigative_journalism_in_bulgaria.pdf

45 "Curbing Media, Crippling Debate. Soft censorship in Bulgaria", WAN IFRA/CIMA/SEEMO, (2016): <http://www.seemo.org/assets/pdf/soft-censorship-bulgaria.pdf>

46 AEJ Annual Report 2017: <http://aej-bulgaria.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Annual-Report-2017.pdf>

47 Ibid.

48 "CMPF Media Pluralism Report Bulgaria 2017", CMPF (2018): cmpf.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Bulgaria_MPM2017_country-report.pdf

49 „Media Freedom in Bulgaria", Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2017): <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/71.13573/>

50 Corruption and collusion between media, politicians, and oligarchs is widespread. RSF Report Bulgaria (2018): <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>

51 "Media Sustainability Index 2018. Bulgaria.", IREX (2018), p.34ff: <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-full.pdf>

Besides the interviews the delegation of this mission held on the ground, many older reports refer to the media market as being uncompetitive, suiting the authorities that are willing to bribe media owners to ensure positive reporting. As a result, biased and polarised publishing is described as being common in the country. "Peevski is the symbol for censorship," said a journalist from bivol.bg, who was himself working for another media outlet before Peevski bought it in 2007.

Of course, one cannot put all media outlets in one box. "There are still some with quality journalistic standards," says a representative of a private TV station. Also, an interviewee told the delegation, the management of the Bulgarian National Radio stands against censorship and political interference. Still, sometimes specific topics are not investigated or reported on.

Several journalists described how they cannot always get access to information if they work for certain media outlets, which also represents a kind of censorship. Sources spoke of being framed for speaking to the "wrong" journalists.

In fact, cases of censorship and threats against whistleblowers, investigative journalists and governmental alerts of corruption and crime are increasing in the country. In the 2017 AEJ report, titled "The big comeback of political pressure", over 2/3 of the 200 Bulgarian journalists interviewed admit that most of the interference comes from the country's politicians, and 92%

defined such interference as "common" and "widespread". Due to such pressures, many journalists admit to having "become more cautious" while reporting and "[lost] interest in the profession", or even report "psychological and health problems".⁵²

In October 2017, television journalist Viktor Nikolaev was threatened by Deputy Prime Minister Valeri Simeonov and Member of Parliament (MP) Anton Todorov, who said Nikolaev would be fired if he continued investigating an aircraft purchase by the government.⁵³ The same year, another case of high-level censorship was that of Dilyana Daytandzhieva: Her report exposing weapons sales in Syria was censored and she was suspended from her job.⁵⁴ Both dismissals illustrate the absence of legal protection for alerts that allege corruption and irregularities.⁵⁵

OBCT recently highlighted this absence with a case in 2014,⁵⁶ whereby four activists notified the Prosecution Office about alleged irregularities in Delyan Peevski's tax returns. The activists claimed that the returns showed a disproportionately low amount of tax paid. After the Prosecution Office deemed the revelation to be unfounded, Peevski counter-accused the activists and ordered documentation of their income and taxes. The Prosecution Office obliged; the tax audits came to nothing, and yet the threat against the activists' practice was maintained.

Since 2013, the Control Bureau for Special Intelligence has raised the issue of censorship at the

52 Annual Study of the Freedom of Speech in Bulgaria (2018) Association of European Journalists (AEJ-Bulgaria) <http://www.ajej-bulgaria.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Great-Comeback-of-Political-Pressure-2017.pdf>

53 "Freedom House Press Freedom Report Bulgaria, 2018", Freedom House (2018): <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/bulgaria>

54 "Bulgaria: outrage as journalist loses job after revealing secret arms trade to Syria." ECPMF (01.09.2017) <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/bulgaria-journalist-sacked-after-scoop>

55 "Why does a "whistleblower" remain an exotic phenomenon for Bulgaria?" OBCT (01/2018) <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Why-does-a-whistleblower-remain-an-exotic-phenomenon-for-Bulgaria-184969>

56 Ibid.

level of bugging devices. The Control Bureau's chairman then had his access to classified information restricted by the Prosecution Office and was dismissed from his position soon afterwards. The chairman has alleged that journalists have been wiretapped as well.⁵⁷

Such victimisation and censorship of journalists and whistleblowers indicate Bulgaria's growing disregard for press and media freedom.

Violence and abuse against Journalists

In recent years, violence, threats, and harassment against journalists in Bulgaria have not been uncommon, as monitoring outlets have reported.

For example, in September 2018, ECPMF's Journalist in Residence Dimitar Stoyanov (bivol.bg) and his colleague Attila Biro (Rise Project Romania) were arrested while they were investigating a EU funds fraud case in Bulgaria. Their research was funded by the "IJ4EU" grant for cross-border investigative journalism projects, managed by the International Press Institute (IPI) and launched as part of the ECPMF's EU-funded activities.⁵⁸ After their unlawful detention, ECPMF in September wrote an open letter to the Bulgarian Prime Minister urging him to ensure journalists' safety.⁵⁹

Just weeks later, in October 2018, TV anchor-woman Viktoria Marinova – who was working for the Ruse local "TVN" channel – was raped and murdered while jogging in broad daylight in her hometown in Bulgaria. This happened shortly after she had presented the first episode of the



National Palace of Culture Sofia, Bulgaria.

Photo: ECPMF

programme "Detektor," which featured pre-recorded interviews both Stoyanov and Biro on their arrest and the case they were investigating. A second episode of "Detektor" had already been planned, again in cooperation with Bivol's team: It would have covered the Hitrino train derailment accident, which had resulted in the death of seven people in 2016. According to Bulgarian investigative journalists, the same companies that had been involved in the alleged fraud with EU funds, had also won a public procurement deal in the Hitrino case.⁶⁰

Although the criminal investigation, which led to the arrest of one man, classified Marinova's murder as a case of sexual assault not linked to her professional engagements, her death caused international outrage over the increased violence against investigative reporters in general in Europe – but also as a direct consequence of the poor state of media freedom in Bulgaria. From May 2014 to September 2018, "Mapping Media Freedom", a project of ECPMF partner Index on Censorship, recorded 36 verified incidents

57 "Tapping of police, magistrates and journalists' phones in Bulgaria confirmed". BNR (4/2018): <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100862843/tapping-of-police-magistrates-and-journalists-phones-in-bulgaria-confirmed>

58 "Why two journalists investigating EU funds fraud were arrested in Bulgaria." ECPMF (14.09.2018) <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/why-two-journalists-investigating-eu-funds-fraud-were-arrested-in-bulgaria>

59 "Bulgaria: protect journalists instead of harassing them." ECPMF (25.09.2018) <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/open-letter-to-bulgarias-prime-minister-boyko-borissov>

60 Wikipedia Victoria Marinova (accessed 12/2018): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_Marinova#cite_note-5

posing a threat to media freedom in the Balkan country.⁶¹

During the ECPMF Expert Talk on Bulgaria at the European Parliament in Brussels, also in 2018, Stoyanov had spoken about how he had been repeatedly beaten up because of his investigative reporting. He described how he had to go on the

run, staying at a different place every night, and how his relationship broke down because of the threats and violence against him.⁶²

Another example is that of local reporter Stoyan Tonchev, who was beaten up with baseball bats by two men in 2016. This is a case for which the ECPMF called an inquiry at the time.⁶³

Lack of trust and media illiteracy

In a 2017 survey, commissioned by Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung⁶⁴ in conjunction with the South East European Media Forum (SEEMF), only 10% of Bulgarian citizens stated that they believed in the independence of national media, while only 11% felt well-informed by politicians.

Besides these statistics, fact-finding mission interviewees mentioned the general lack of public trust in authorities such as the judiciary and police. A vast majority described Bulgarian public discourse as poisoned by polarisation, aggression, discrimination, insults, and hate speech. With regard to the fact that some media outlets are supported by foreign funds, such as America for Bulgaria, one interviewee claimed that Bulgarian society is still suspicious of perceived "foreign agents" and liberal democracy in general.

The deep division and polarisation in the media sector seem to contribute to the lack of trust as well: "Not knowing which economic and political interests stand behind the news and the public

fighters between local media owners leads to confusion for the readers," explains one interviewee. Confusion can leave the reader vulnerable to disinformation and propaganda and weaken her or his "immune system" against fake or instrumentalised news, also supporting the spread and appeal of conspiracy theories.⁶⁵

"The audience does not demand facts, they don't believe in facts," claims one journalist interviewed, while another says: "Journalists are perceived to be paid to ruin someone else's reputation."

Additionally, an interviewee explained this phenomenon in historical terms: "In the times of communism, when media was exclusively funded by the regime, nobody expected to be able to speak freely. When the new print media appeared, after the fall of the Berlin wall, it was mainly owned by members of the former secret services."

As still only 60% of the population currently has

61 Mapping Media Freedom Bulgaria (accessed 07/2018) <https://mappingmediafreedom.org/?k=bulgaria#/>

62 "Bulgaria: time to tackle the nightmare next door." ECPMF (26.01.2018) <https://www.ecpmf.eu/news/ecpmf/bulgaria-time-to-tackle-the-nightmare-next-door>

63 "Bulgarian beaten up - ECPMF calls for inquiry." ECPMF (20.01.2016) <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/archive/bulgarian-beaten-up-ecpmf-calls-for-inquiry>

64 "Nur jeder zehnte Bulgare hält Medien für unabhängig" KAS (11/2017): http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_50891-1522-1-30.pdf?171129134940

65 Media Literacy Index. Open Society Institute (2018): http://osi.bg/downloads/File/2018/MediaLiteracyIndex%202018_%20publishBG.pdf

access to the Internet⁶⁶, millions of people have but limited alternative sources of information. This limited online access – combined with widespread distrust – leaves Bulgarian media constrained and demeaned.

One of the interviewees described this media freedom situation as resulting from an accumulation of factors: the overall economic, social and political environment, including corruption; lack of quality journalism; and Bulgaria's post-communist mindset, influenced by a history of propaganda.

According to a 2016 report issued by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), there had been no national policy supporting media for communities. The plan for the current school year, however, is to introduce media literacy hours in local schools' compulsory curricula, starting from the fourth grade, even if the number and content of the lessons on the subject remains unclear.

The introduction of media literacy is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, but it needs to be further strengthened to deliver concrete results. Especially in polarised media landscapes such as the Bulgarian one, media literacy is a fundamental tool for citizens, and especially for the younger generations – to help them understand and categorise public information, and inform public opinion.

Journalistic education, professionalism and general working conditions

Journalism education in universities and relevant professional standards were described as being at a good level by some interviewees. However,

others maintained that, in practice, journalistic education, professionalism and integrity are insufficient.

Deep polarization – another recurring theme in this mission report – seems to be another factor hampering Bulgaria's journalistic development. For instance, the aforementioned Bulgarian Media Union, an alternative alliance of publishers created in 2012, has been described as leading to divisions within the profession and industry.⁶⁷ But no matter to what "group" they belong, the Union of Bulgarian Publishers claimed the rights of journalists are not being protected.

In short, journalism seems to have become an unattractive field of work. Besides the risks they suffer, media workers employed on minimal wages become vulnerable to bribes, especially if they work freelance or at the regional level. "It is impossible for regional journalists not to work with regional authorities; they completely depend on the municipalities," claims one of the mission's interviewees.

As general working conditions for journalists are commonly very hard, and there is often little room for quality journalism, many aim or are forced to look for another occupation. "It is very difficult to find motivated young journalists these days in Bulgaria," says an interviewee.

Also, interviewees describe a big gap between what journalism students learn in theory and how they can implement their professional skills, e.g. ethical standards, in practice. Again, self-censorship, smear campaigns, political and business pressure and, in general, unsatisfying working conditions and lack of personal safety, are common obstacles to overcome in Bulgaria.

66 Individuals using the Internet. The World Bank (accessed 11/18): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=BG>

67 Media capture, made in Bulgaria. M. Dragomir (02/2018): <http://seenpm.org/media-capture-made-bulgaria/>

Conclusion and recommendations

The media environment seems to be both a cause and a consequence of the democratic environment in Bulgaria. It is not a politically or economically enabling environment for independent journalism and media pluralism. Where we experience a lack of the rule of law and a lack of functioning institutions like the judiciary, media freedom is at risk.

A high level of media concentration, combined with a low level of media pluralism – with a number of media outlets having closed since the 2008 financial crisis – contributes to a problematic media freedom situation on the ground. It is difficult to produce quality journalism in Bulgaria, and to stay independent in a highly dependent market. Funding problems, pressure, as well as surveillance are contributing to the risk of independent media being captured.

According to the CMPF 2018 report, the four major barriers to media pluralism in Bulgaria refer to the allocation of state advertising, concentration of ownership, interference in editorial content, and the state of media literacy.⁶⁸ In order to enhance media pluralism, suitable methodologies should be developed and applied to assess media ownership concentration – taking into account the influence of individual media, as well as the aggregated influence of a media group across sectoral boundaries. Simultaneously, the crucial role of a truly independent public service should be recognised, and its operational autonomy and editorial independence protected.

In addition, a lack of transparency in the cash-flow among government, media owners, advertisers, business owners, and media outlets is seen as a major problem for free media in the country. Despite the visible improvements in-

troducted between its first submission as a draft to the parliament and its final approval, the new Bulgarian law on media ownership transparency does not address all the doubts expressed regarding its real impact on the country's media environment. A clearer assessment will be possible only after its effects become measurable, in the coming months and years.

When we asked fact-finding mission interviewees about how to improve the outlook for independent journalism and media freedom in Bulgaria, they mentioned media literacy and education as paramount – to increase critical thinking and to show the public how journalism works in dialogue. As this report mentioned, the introduction of media literacy in the compulsory curricula in Bulgarian schools is a positive development, but one that needs to be strengthened. Further initiatives are necessary, inside and outside of the educational system, such as the creation of a co-ordinated national media literacy network bringing together a wide range of stakeholders. As a soft measure, this could contribute to boosting public awareness and understanding of the role of the media, as well as importance of independent journalism, to serving the interests of the public. Critical thinking should also be promoted, by encouraging initiatives to improve the effective exposure of users to the broadest possible diversity of media content.

Investigative journalism, especially at the local and regional level, needs to be supported externally for as long as independent outlets cannot be financed by the Bulgarian public. The creation and functioning of minority, regional, local and non-profit community media should be encouraged by providing financial mechanisms to foster their development.

68 "CMPF Media Pluralism Report Bulgaria 2017", CMPF (2018): cmpf.eu.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Bulgaria_MPM2017_country-report.pdf

New sources of financing, through e.g. membership or crowdfunding business models, should be encouraged, too – though, so far, interviewees mentioned a limited demand from the Bulgarian public. However, such new business models, especially for online media, need to be considered in order to further support independent outlets.

Self-regulatory mechanisms should be put in place and the country's media law needs to be used efficiently to protect journalists – not to harm and silence them.

In addition, further professional training courses for journalists were seen as an effective instrument. However, the unattractiveness of the profession and the inability to implement professional journalistic standards in practice can only be countered by an improvement in the working conditions for journalists, regarding their physical and mental health. Therefore, the high level of (self-)censorship also needs to be tackled, and the independence of the media regulator needs to be ensured.

Moreover, at the local and regional level, it was mentioned that mayors of municipalities would need to support independent media outlets. And the support of civil society groups is important. Local rivals stand in the way of joint efforts and coalitions trying to overcome the problematic situation.

There is a strong need for trustworthy information and transparency of media ownership, which also needs to include transparency of the cash

flows behind media outlets in general. Meanwhile, Bulgarian journalism is increasingly reliant on EU funding.

The Bulgarian government should disseminate funds on an equal basis to all media; also those being critical towards the government. The European institutions need to increase their instruments to be able to control how national budgets are allocated under EU programmes. These institutions also need to increase their pressure at the local level, to ensure transparency of cash flow and therefore avoid political interference and maintain independent, free media.

One journalist the mission interviewed worries that “the current shady political practices should not be legitimated by foreign partners, otherwise the media landscape will deteriorate further.” Hence, attention and solidarity from international media remain crucial as a means of moral support to the remaining critical voices on the ground.

Political will needs to be fostered for reforms and anti-corruption measures. Only by improving the integrity of local institutions and the implementation of the rule of law can an enabling environment for media freedom be created in Bulgaria. The further range of possible measures included in the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1[1] of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership⁶⁹ should be considered and implemented.

69 Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1[1] of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680790e13

Methodology

One of the mission's objectives was to conduct face-to-face interviews with media and political stakeholders, NGOs, governmental organisations, and journalists about the situation of media ownership in Bulgaria. After profound research and study of existing reports about the situation in the country, the focus of the mission was further defined by sending a short questionnaire to Bulgarian media experts beforehand. In the next step, key interviewees were identified and approached.

The delegation conducted 15 interviews with representatives from several media outlets, NGOs, political and media law experts, and others. Unfortunately, the delegation could not meet

with the Bulgarian National Committee to Protect Competition, the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Culture (all requested). Most of the in-depth interviews were conducted on the neutral premises of a co-working space in the city centre of Sofia.

In assembling this report, personal experiences and insights were put in context with previous reports and concerns raised by national, regional and international organisations that are dealing with freedom of expression as well as the expertise of the mission's members in counterbalancing such cases. The final outcome of the fact-finding mission, alongside series of journalistic outputs, is this report.

List of meetings/interviewees:

The international mission to Bulgaria included meetings with the following people and representatives of the following media and civil society organisations (list not exhaustive):

- Snezhana Todorova, Union of Bulgarian Journalists
- Ivo Prokopiev, Economedia
- Nelly Ognyanova, Media Law Expert
- Yana Pelovska, Media Development Centre
- Stefan Tafrov, former Representative of Bulgaria to the UN
- Lyubomira Budakova, Telegraph Media Group (former NBMG)
- Rossen Bossev, Capital weekly
- Assen Jordanov + Dimitar Stoyanov, Bivol.bg
- Boiko Stankushev, Bulgaria National Radio
- Venelin Petkov, bTV Media Group
- Ivan Bedrov, Club Z
- Journalist from Nova TV
- America for Bulgaria Foundation
- Representation of the European Commission
- Association of European Journalists (AEJ) Bulgaria

Sources

- ▶ "A comparative analysis of media freedom and pluralism in the EU Member States." Directorate general for internal policies. LIBE (2016): [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571376/IPOL_STU\(2016\)571376_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571376/IPOL_STU(2016)571376_EN.pdf)
- ▶ Afera.bg leak (2013): afera.bg/ето-ги-скандалните-записи-на-бойко-бор.html
- ▶ "Annual Report 2017", AEJ-BULGARIA (2018): <http://aej-bulgaria.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Annual-Report-2017.pdf>
- ▶ "Annual Report measures rise in threats and pressures on the media", AEJ-BULGARIA (2018): http://www.aej.org/page.asp?p_id=622
- ▶ Annual Study of the Freedom of Speech in Bulgaria (2018) Association of European Journalists (AEJ-Bulgaria) <http://www.aej-bulgaria.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/The-Great-Comeback-of-Political-Pressure-2017.pdf>
- ▶ "Bulgarian beaten up - ECPMF calls for inquiry." ECPMF (20.01.2016) <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/archive/bulgarian-beaten-up-ecpmf-calls-for-inquiry>
- ▶ "Bulgaria's Charlie Hebdo' Blocked From News Stands", Balkan Insight, (07.03.2017): <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/new-satirical-newspaper-in-bulgaria-censored-publishers-say-03-06-2017>
- ▶ "Bulgaria harasses independent media group again." RSF (08.11.2018) <https://rsf.org/en/news/bulgaria-harasses-independent-media-group-again>
- ▶ "Bulgaria freezes assets of independent media publisher." Reuters (12.12. 2017) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-freeze-media/bulgaria-freezes-assets-of-independent-media-publisher-idUSKBN1E62gD>
- ▶ "Bulgaria - Opinion on the Judicial System Act, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 112th Plenary Session", Council of Europe/Venice Commission, (2017): [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2017\)018-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2017)018-e)
- ▶ "Bulgaria: outrage as journalist loses job after revealing secret arms trade to Syria." ECPMF (01.09.2017) <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/bulgaria-journalist-sacked-after-scoop>
- ▶ "Bulgaria: protect journalists instead of harassing them." ECPMF (25.09.2018) <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/open-letter-to-bulgarias-prime-minister-boyko-borissov>
- ▶ "Bulgaria: time to tackle the nightmare next door." ECPMF (26.01.2018) <https://www.ecpmf.eu/news/ecpmf/bulgaria-time-to-tackle-the-nightmare-next-door>
- ▶ Bulgaria: The Age of the Oligarchs. Resource Centre (July 2014) <https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/Publications/Reports/Bulgaria-The-Age-of-the-Oligarchs>
- ▶ "Bulgaria, where the local press can be bought for cheap", OBCT, (06.02.2017): <https://www.balkanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Bulgaria-where-the-local-press-can-be-bought-for-cheap-177272>
- ▶ "CMPF Media Pluralism Report 2016", CMPF (2017): <http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/bulgaria/>
- ▶ "CMPF Media Pluralism Report 2017", CMPF (2018): cmpf.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Bulgaria_MPM2017_country-report.pdf
- ▶ Commission Staff Working Document Bulgaria: Technical Report. European Commission (2017) https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/comm-2017-700_en.pdf
- ▶ Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (accessed 11/2018) www.parliament.bg/en/const

- ▶ Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1[1] of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680790e13
- ▶ "Country analysis, Bulgaria", Reporters without Borders (RSF) (2018): <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>
- ▶ "Curbing Media, Crippling Debate. Soft censorship in Bulgaria", WAN IFRA/CIMA/SEEMO, (2016): <http://www.seemo.org/assets/pdf/soft-censorship-bulgaria.pdf>
- ▶ Corruption and collusion between media, politicians, and oligarchs is widespread. RSF Report Bulgaria (2018): <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>
- ▶ Executive Summary "EU Report Analyzing Bulgaria's Prosecution Service Wants to See Improved Criminal Procedure" 2016 <http://www.mjs.bg/Files/Executive%20Summary%20Final%20Report%20BG%2015122016.pdf>
- ▶ "Freedom House Press Freedom Report, 2018", Freedom House (2018): <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2018/bulgaria>
- ▶ "Freedom of the Press in Bulgaria", OBCT (May 2018): <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Dossier-Freedom-of-the-press-in-Bulgaria-187405>
- ▶ Individuals using the Internet. The World Bank (accessed 11/18): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=BG>
- ▶ "Letter to the US embassy exposes "Bulgartabac" scheme", bivol.bg (07.07. 2015): <https://bivol.bg/en/letter-to-the-us-embassy-exposes-bulgartabac-scheme-featuring-boyko-borisov-ahmed-dogan-and-delyan-peeovski.html>
- ▶ Mapping Media Freedom Bulgaria (accessed 07/2018) <https://mappingmediafreedom.org/?k=bulgaria#/>
- ▶ "Media capture, made in Bulgaria", Marius Dragomir (2018): <http://seenpm.org/media-capture-made-bulgaria/>
- ▶ „Media Freedom in Bulgaria”, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2017): <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/71.13573/>
- ▶ Media Literacy Index. Open Society Institute (2018): http://osi.bg/downloads/File/2018/MediaLiteracyIndex%202018_%20publishBG.pdf
- ▶ "Media Sustainability Index 2018. Bulgaria.", IREX (2018) <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-full.pdf>
- ▶ Mission So Possible: Investigative Journalism in Bulgaria. RSF (2018) https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/investigative_journalism_in_bulgaria_.pdf
- ▶ "New RSF report on obstacles to investigative journalism in Bulgaria", Reporters without Borders (RSF) (2018): <https://rsf.org/en/reports/new-rsf-report-obstacles-investigative-journalism-bulgaria>
- ▶ "Nur jeder zehnte Bulgare hält Medien für unabhängig" KAS (11/2017) http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_50891-1522-1-30.pdf?171129134940
- ▶ "Peevski transfers his media related bussiness to a foundation, but will keep on support it financially" ("Пеевски прехвърля медийния си бизнес на фондация, но ще помага материално") Dnevnik.bg, (10.10.2018): https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/10/10/3325331_peeovski-prehvurlia-mediiniia_si_biznes_na_fondaciia_no/
- ▶ "Research: what are we reading", AEJ-Bulgaria, (2018): <http://printmediareport.aej-bulgaria.org/>

- ▶ "Tapping of police, magistrates and journalists' phones in Bulgaria confirmed". BNR (4/2018): <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100862843/tapping-of-police-magistrates-and-journalists-phones-in-bulgaria-confirmed>
- ▶ "The Age of the Oligarchs: How a group of political and economic magnates have taken control of Bulgaria" Stefan Antonov (2013): <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/The%2520Age%2520of%2520Oligarchs.pdf>
- ▶ "The Media freedom White Paper", Union of Publishers in Bulgaria (2018): https://www.enpa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/White_Paper_ENG%20%28004%29_0.pdf
- ▶ "The State of Regional Media in Bulgaria", Daniel Penev (2016): http://www.fmd.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/regional-media-in-bulgaria-_mdf_-daniel-penev.pdf
- ▶ Transparency International. Bulgaria (2018) <https://www.transparency.org/country/BGR>
- ▶ "Violence corruption and censorship: The realities of being a journalist in Bulgaria", Index on Censorship (September 2018): <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/category/europe-central-asia/bulgaria/>
- ▶ "Why does a "whistleblower" remain an exotic phenomenon for Bulgaria?" OBCT (01/2018) <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Why-does-a-whistleblower-remain-an-exotic-phenomenon-for-Bulgaria-184969>
- ▶ "Why two journalists investigating EU funds fraud were arrested in Bulgaria." ECPMF (14.09.2018) <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/why-two-journalists-investigating-eu-funds-fraud-were-arrested-in-bulgaria>
- ▶ Wikipedia Victoria Marinova (accessed 12/2018): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_Marinova#cite_note-5
- ▶ Законът на Пеевски за медиите безпрепятствено мина през медийната комисия (zakonut na peevski za mediate bezprepiatstveno mina) (Capital.bg 25.10.2018) https://www.capital.bg/biznes/media_i_reklama/2018/10/25/3333703_zakonut_na_peevski_za_mediite_bezprepiatstveno_mina/

