MACEDONIA

**HIGH TIME
TO PROTECT
MEDIA FREEDOM**

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**Report on the April 2017
Joint International Mission**

Republic of Macedonia: Media Freedom in Turbulent Times

Report on the April 2017 Joint International Mission

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This report was compiled by the ECPMF and Ilcho Cvetanoski.

Members of the delegation:

Nora Wehofsits, ECPMF

Katharina Mikulcak, ECPMF

Ricardo Gutierrez, EFJ

Mitja Mersol, SEEMO

Ilcho Cvetanoski, OBCT

Kristina Naceva *(interpreter)*

With the support of

Nikola Naumovski, ZNM

Dragan Sekulovski, ZNM

Naser Selmani, ZNM

Photos:

ECPMF

Layout:

Andreas Lamm – ECPMF

Abstract

In a joint mission, the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), and the Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT) observed the situation of journalists and media workers in the Republic of Macedonia. The on-site research in Macedonia in April 2017 was motivated by the deterioration of the safety of journalists through the increasing number in verbal and physical attacks.

This report indicates that through complex set of mechanism the previous government, as well as authorities, gave their best to fully control the media sphere with the final aim to advance and prolong their reign. These tendencies can be observed through analysing the on-ground work and comparing it with theoretical research in a coherent framework of tools and strategies that were used as a sort of blueprint on how to control the media. One the one hand, political elites, linked with a lack of political will to protect journalists and freedom of the media, are partially responsible for the unsatisfactory situation in the country. On the other side a fair share of the responsibility lies at international organisations and journalists themselves for not being fully proactive in tackling pressing issues. With the given testimonials of Macedonian journalists and media workers underlining this assessment, the report gives on-ground perspective and first-hand experience on the main issues that are undermining professional journalism in the country. Finally, the missions' delegation will conclude with recommendations to the newly elected Macedonian government, journalists, and the international as well as the European community on how to change the situation according to international standards.

Introduction

Motivated by the ever-increasing number of physical and verbal incidents against journalists in Macedonia[1], the *Association of Journalists of Macedonia* (**ZNM**) and the *Western Balkan's Regional Platform for Advocating Media Freedom and Journalists Safety* invited the *European Centre for Press and Media Freedom* (**ECPMF**) with its partners to conduct an on-site research.

The mission took place from April 26th until April 28th 2017. The delegation included two representatives from the ECPMF and one from the partner organizations, the *European Federation of Journalists* (**EFJ**), the *South East Europe Media Organisation* (**SEEMO**) and the *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa* (**OBCT**).

In the initial invitation, the inviting organisations on the ground stressed the alarming fact that none of the incidents was addresses or resolved by the authorities. "Impunity for attacks against journalists encourages more violence with far greater consequences," Western Balkan's Regional platform's spokesperson Borka Rudic said. Naser Selmani, president of ZNM, blamed the ruling parties for creating "an atmosphere in which such incidents occurred with impunity." Over the last 4 years, the ZNM recorded more than 40 attacks on journalists[2]. Those attacks appear in verbal and physical fashion. They range from constant verbal threats against journalists as well as their relatives and the burning of the journalists' cars. Even to a case of severe physical attack by masked group who intercept journalist on their way home.

Worrying are the increasing numbers of attacks by the police and the public that include the damaging of press offices and media outlets. Usually, those incidents are motivated by the anti-media rhetoric by political authorities and the public. With an existing culture of impunity for attacks against journalists, that encourages the attackers to act even more aggressively to force far greater and more negative consequences. Consequently, journalists in Macedonia currently seem to live in an atmosphere of violence and fear that makes their work not only more complicated but also increasingly dangerous.

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1   In accordance with other partner organisations, the ECPMF uses the term 'Republic of Macedonia' or simply Macedonia, while acknowledging the provisional term Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, used by the European Union and the United Nations.

2   ZNM's registry on cases of violation of rights of journalists. More details can be found at: http://znm.org.mk/?attachment_id=3436&lang=en

According to the mission's findings, there is a lack of political will to ensure conditions for a free and independent journalism in Macedonia. The mission stresses the alarming fact that national authorities investigated almost none of the incidents against journalists properly. State institutions and political stakeholders undertake no responsibility for the protection of journalists. The criminal and civil justice systems do not deal effectively with threats and acts of violence against journalists. No implementation of media protection laws and no prosecution of the perpetrators make journalists an easy target, the delegates stated.

In this regard, the outcome of the fact-finding mission identified three variables that threaten freedom of press and the right for information in Macedonia. First, the high number of verbal and physical threats against journalists. Second, an environment of impunity and the anti-media rhetoric in the public that fuels resentments against the media landscape and journalists in general. Third, the missing implementation of a media law according to the European Convention on Human Rights that leaves threats against journalists without any consequences. As this report is based on interviews with selected stakeholders, instead of asserting the claim of being representative, valid and reliable, the report should rather have an explorative character and undermine existing findings giving insights in the situation on the ground.

Background

The delegation arrived in the capital Skopje in a time of significant political turmoil. In the last years of VMRO - DPMNE[3] and DUI[4] ruling, the country has been in a state of worsening political crisis. It all started with students' protests against the coalition's undemocratic practices and later culminated with the exposure of [underline]wiretapped materials[/underline] by the then oppositional Social Democratic Union of Macedonia ([underline]SDSM[/underline])[5]. The opposition accused the government of committing a series of illegal actions, amongst is the surveillance of allegedly 20.000 citizens over a four-year period. Additionally, in order to control the media the government wiretapped some 100 journalists according to the SDSM.

The exposure of the scandal triggered citizen's protests alongside with political [underline]negotiations[/underline] that were focused on institutional and legal reforms with the final aim of early elections. Once the negotiations[6] did end and a date was set the crisis evolved by a double postponement of the snap [underline]elections[/underline] that eventually took place in December 2016.

After the elections[7], the two previously governing parties, a coalition of VMRO - DPMNE and DUI, started negotiations on forming a new parliamentary majority, but failed to achieve an agreement. After a long line of political negotiations, trickeries and obstructions led by VMRO – DPMNE elite, the second best contestant SDSM was granted the mandate to negotiate on the new ruling majority. SDSM, together with DUI and Alliance for Albanians[8], made a deal on forming the new government.

During the negotiations, several non-governmental organizations tightly connected with the former ruling elite and VMRO-DPMNE sympathizers set off protests against forming of the new majority. A series of demonstrations subsequently resulted in the storming of the Parliament Assembly on the night of April 27th.

It is important to note that the sharp decline of media freedom largely coincided with the ruling time of the VMRO - DPMNE and DUI government. The constant deterioration, in the period 2009-2017, is recorded through the yearly rankings and re-

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3   VMRO – DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) is one of the two main parties in Macedonia. It is considered as conservative/Christian Democratic Party. (Clarification: there is no clear-cut political ideology in the political spectrum of the country. Parties that promote themselves as conservative could uphold and promote economic measures typical for left wing parties and vice versa.)

4   DUI (Democratic Union for Integration) is the main ethnic Albanian party in Macedonia. It has been in power from 2002 to 2006 and since 2008 until today. It was formed immediately after the country's 2001 conflict between the National Liberation Army (NLA) and the Macedonian Security Forces. The NLA leader Ali Ahmeti became party president. It is considered as conservative party mostly dealing with and promoting ethnic rights.

5   SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) is one of the two main parties in Macedonia. The party occupies the centre-left political spectrum with social democratic ideology. It is considered as the only major political party with civic ideology.

6   With an accusation exchange on corruption and wiretapping that took place between the main opposition SDSM and the ruling conservatives VMRO-DPMNE, European Union brokered a deal with the main parties to hold elections.

7   None of the contesting parties won the necessary 61 seats for a governing majority. At the end VMRO – DPMNE, the ruling party since 2006, won 51 seats; the main opposition party SDSM had 49; DUI, DPMNE's coalition partner since 2008, won 10 seats; the newly formed BESA movement had 5; the newly formed Alliance for the Albanians won 3 MPs; and Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) had 2 seats.

8   Alliance for the Albanians is a new political party organised just before the 2016 elections. It is considered a conservative ethnic party. Ziadin Sela, the Major of the town Struga, leads it.

ports from international governmental and non-governmental organisations, media freedom and journalists' groups, and advocacy groups' assessments:

- **Reporters without Borders**' (**RSF**) World Press Freedom Index shows that the country has fallen behind 77 places in the period of 2009 until today. In 2009 it was ranked 34th, its all-time best. In 2017 it ranks at 111th out of 180 countries.

- **Freedom House** recorded that in the last eight years media freedom in the Republic of Macedonia deteriorated constantly. In its 2017 Freedom of the Press report Macedonia's status was "not free" concerning press freedom. Macedonia, along with Russia, Belorussia and Turkey, is one of the four European countries evaluated as "not free".

- The **IREX** Media Sustainability Index described the situation as an "unsustainable mixed system". In its report from 2016 it says that the "prolonged political crisis has fortified the existing divisions in Macedonia's media sector, primarily along political lines, into pro-government and critical/independent/pro-opposition media." In this year's report it underlines that "the political divisions in the media landscape run so deep, that pro-government outlets go so far as to claim attacks on journalists have not taken place and are simply false accusations to smear the government or ruling parties. Other outlets even claim that attacks against reporters are justified."

- The 2016 **OSCE/ODIHR** Election Observation Mission noted "concerns about self-censorship and the lack of editorial independence due to political or business interests." The OSCE/ODIHR received reports from public media employees about pressure and attempts by political stakeholders to influence media employees' editorial decisions.

- Until recently, the Republic of Macedonia, together with Montenegro, Russia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, was one of the five member states of the Council of Europe that imprisoned journalists for their right to exercise their profession. According to the European Federation of Journalists (**EFJ**) until July there were one imprisoned journalists in Macedonia (Zoran Bozhinovski was realised on 14 July 2017 after 15 months in prison. Nonetheless, he is still on trial and under house arrest) and Montenegro. Five in Russia, ten in Azerbaijan and 155 imprisoned journalists in Turkey, to date.

The increase of verbal and physical pressure and even assaults on journalists also coincides with the culmination of the deep political crisis, having its peak in 2016 and 2017.

- **ZNM** and the Western Balkan's Regional Platform for advocating on media freedom and journalists' safety (**WBRP**) in its December 2016 report, "Indicators on the level of media freedom and journalists' safety" (focusing on the period of January 2015 - June 2016), concludes that "the Government does not provide favorable environment for media work." The report says that "journalists are being detained, violence against journalists is tolerated, and public money is used for corrupting the media. Through these practices, the Government significantly and systematically limits the freedom of the media and causes self-censorship among journalists." As a key bad practices that resulted in such sharp decline in media freedom the report emphasize the failure to undertake measures to sanction attacks

against journalists, use of public funds to corrupt media, imprisonment of journalists, economic and social pressure, access to public information is difficult, very slow, and discriminatory. The report underlines that "while the attacks in previous were mostly verbal, a large number of incidents in 2015 are characterised as physical violence against journalists, denying them the right to report as well as confiscating equipment (cameras and mobile phones)". Based on the ZNM's monitoring, conducted in 2015, there is a positive tendency in the decline of court cases against journalists. In June 2014 there were 54 cases, in June 2015 there were 31. "Despite this positive trend the courts are selective when the plaintiff is a high level government official," it is concluded in the report.

- The trend is also noticeable by analysing the incidents by means of Index on Censorship Mapping Media Freedom project (**MMF**). In 2015 there were 28 incidents registered altogether. In 2016 there were 32 in total. Whilst in 2017 there were already 22 incidents listed within nine months.

The Macedonian media system, from a theoretic point of view, falls into the definition of a "polarised pluralist model"[9] also known as a "mediterranean model"[10]. Some of the crucial characteristics are described as the following: a low newspaper circulation; commentary-oriented journalism; a high political parallelism (through links between media outlets and political parties / media reflects political divisions); weak professionalism; strong state intervention; press subsidies; high (self) censorship; as well as savage deregulation.[11]

When analysing the media situation in Macedonia the global trend of an authoritarian/illiberal fixation with the media should also be taken into consideration. This is substantially explained in a recent paper (by Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman). Ruling elites in accordance with the Guriev and Treisman information theory played on the card that the fastest way to their reinstallation in power is through media. Therefore, they are not motivated to reform the media sector and relinquished any control. Consequently, journalists' rights and the freedom of the media are constantly worsening. The authors argue that the distinctive feature of modernised authoritarian leaders is the preoccupation with information.

- The new autocrats use propaganda, censorship and other information-based tricks to inflate their ratings and to convince citizens of their superiority over available alternatives;

- The new autocrats bribe media owners with advertising contracts, threaten libel suits, and encourage pro-regime investors to purchase critical publications;

- The new authoritarians immobilise political rivals with endless court proceedings, interrogations and other legal formalities. No need to create martyrs when one can defeat opponents by wasting their time.

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9   Hallin, C. Daniel and Paolo Mancini. Comparing Media Systems Three Models of Media and Politics, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2004.

10   Ibid.

11   Ibid.

This brief theoretical background is necessary to have a better understanding of the conditions and political atmosphere in which media and journalists work in the Republic of Macedonia.

Subsequently, as outlined by mission's interlocutors and international organizations reports (RSF, ODIHR, Freedom house, IREX, MMF/Index on Censorship, ZNM and WBRP) the main problems undermining media freedom in Macedonia are: high political parallelism that reflects in the face of clientelistic/close connections between media owners and political parties causing self-censorship; weak professionalization and lack of media ethics resulting with a sensationalistic and polarized media coverage with a focus on commentary-oriented journalism; impunity and lack of political will for protection of journalists and safety of media workers; the capture of the media scene by political and business elites and using it as a toll for advancing its business interests; a limited advertisement market causing media to be easily prone to government subsidies.

Storming of the parliament during the mission

It should be emphasised that during the fact-finding mission, on the night of April 27 2017, pro-DPMNE protesters stormed the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia in the capital Skopje. During the violent incident two media workers, a reporter and a photographer were injured whilst at least 21 more were assaulted, threatened, and barred, or their equipment seized. The perpetrators' identity has not been revealed so far, nor have any legal actions been undertaken. This incident is a sad highlight and a prime example of the pressure and violence that journalists are facing.

Methodology

The mission's objective was to conduct face-to-face interviews with media and political stakeholders, NGOs, governmental organisations, and, in the first place, to talk to the media workers (journalists, camera operators, photographers, and editors) about the overall situation in the country and the recent incidents. Its aim was to shed light on the main motives behind the attacks and what are the reasons for the dramatic deterioration of press and media freedom in the Republic of Macedonia.

For assembling the report it was crucial to take the chance of getting first-hand information from the recently attacked media workers, NGO's and institutional stakeholders in order to better understand **why** the media freedom has drastically deteriorated in the last several years, but most of all, **how** the media were muzzled and put under ice.

Therefore, the delegation conducted 15 interviews with 18 representatives from several media outlets, NGOs, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (**AVMS**), and the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (**CMEM**). Additionally, the delegation met the Minister of the Interior, Agim Nuhiu.

In gaining profound understanding of the phenomenon delegation interviewed affected media workers in several locations in the capital Skopje. Most of the in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted on the premises of the ZNM, while others were led in the interlocutor's organisation/institution. Interviews, depending on the schedule and density, were conducted by all, and only in several cases by two or three delegation member.

In assembling this report interlocutor's personal experiences/knowledge was 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.

By taking in consideration the above mentioned aspects this report tries to give more than a plain chronology. The final outcome of the fact-finding mission, alongside series of journalistic outputs, is this report. Its primary goal is to offer a deeper overview of the situation through the interlocutor's testimonials, whilst presenting a broad range of policy suggestions to different stakeholders (from institutions, political parties, the international community, up to media workers themselves) on how to deal with an atmosphere that seemed to support and instigate assaults on media workers.

Testimonials

In the following part, details and most important aspects of each interview are highlighted. The testimonials are structured in chronological order.

Interviewees mainly focused describing the main issues and problems that they are facing in the course of everyday work and responsibilities. They also analysed the broader picture concerning media sphere in the country suggesting some possible solution on how to overcome the harmful state of affairs.

TOMISLAV KEZHAROVSKI, a long time journalist working for different media outlets through his professional career most notably for the oldest daily Nova Makedonija. In October 2013, he was sentenced to four and a half years for exposing the identity of a protected witness in an article published in 2008. After spending almost two years in prison and under house arrest, he was released in January 2015. Since August 2017, he is a fellow at the Hamburg Foundation for the Politically Persecuted People in Germany.

During the interview, Tomislav Kezharovski underlined **the problem of economic insecurity for journalists and intimidation attempts by the government as well as affiliated oligarchs.** As an example, soon after Kezharovski was released from prison, he applied for jobs in several media outlets. He was surprised as none of the media outlets wanted to hire him. They all pointed out that they do not want to have any trouble with the government. "The governments tries to erase me as a journalist", Kezharovski states. Even his former employee, the daily *Nova Makedonija*, did not hire Kezharovski again. As an alternative, they offered him a kind of early retirement. He would receive some money for not doing anything. He did not accept this kind of deal as it was denigrating for him and for the colleague's journalists who work for their salaries. Therefore, with a help of a friend he established a small news website.

"I would fool myself, If am still working as a journalist," Kezharovski says. Working as a journalist and advertising agent, when Kezharovski shows up at a company to offer his website for advertisement, the management usually refuses the offer. "They are afraid that they will get problems with the authorities if they advertise on my website," he concludes.

In addition, the fear amongst journalists to be prosecuted is very high. Kezharovski points out that during his prison time only two media outlets from Macedonia approached his family for an interview regarding his imprisonment. While a large number of international journalists reported about the incident and asked his family for interviews. "This is an excellent example how freedom of speech is undermined and intimated by the government in Macedonia," Kezharovski points out.

Living an almost solitary life, he and his family did not leave the house after dark for security reasons. As a final message and advice, Kezharovski said that he "would like to encourage other journalists to carry on with their investigative journalism and never to give up". Further, Kezharovksi wants to publish a book in which he underline his profession as a journalist.

DEJAN GEORGIEVSKI, a long-time activist, is working on projects closely connected to the media. He is the president and executive director of the Media Development Center, an NGO from Skopje. He is also the author of the recent 'IREX Media Sustainability Index Report' on Macedonia.

During the interview, Georgievski gave an in-depth analysis of the media landscape in Macedonia, underlining economic issues as a key problem. "The **media market is over saturated and overcrowded,"** he points out. According to the IREX report, which was conducted by Georgievski himself, the **media market is too small** to sustain 136 broadcasters out of which around 60% is obtained by TV stations and 40% by radio stations and nine daily newspapers. [12] In the meantime, from the start of the mission until the publication of the report, the owners under the pretext of economic problems/unprofitability shut down several daily newspapers. From his point of view, the Macedonian media market can obtain only a quarter of its present media outlets to be profitable.

In this kind of environment, "there is no way to return your investments only through media activities," Georgievski argues. Consequently, the former ruling coalition of VMRO-DPMNE shamelessly and unscrupulously used this situation to muzzle the media. Public spending by the state in the media market is currently the biggest investor. Therefore, the former government became practically one of the biggest investor in the country's media market.

On the other hand, **many private businesses opened TV stations to use them for political advantage** aimed at advancing their primary businesses. It is cheaper for businesses to open a TV channel or radio station than to advertise in the public media market. "For example, a construction company opened a TV station so they could advance their chances of winning public tenders," he added.

Overall, Georgievski concludes, the variable of **economic violence** is the overarching problem in Macedonia. "When the society experiences high unemployment rates and low salaries, corruption has an easy way," he said.

According to Georgievski, the broadcasting sector needs a complete redesign and restart to eliminate corruption. Positive external influence from other countries could be one possible solution to the above mentioned problem. As one of possible solutions is the idea that media sector should start from scratch – all the licences should be revoked and only a limited number of media outlets should get licensed to the market.

In the current Macedonia, violence should be considered as the prize for being a journalist. "There is a common reputation of journalists as being liars on any topic which fuels dangerous and hateful sentiments against us." As a measure to tackle verbal and physical violence against journalists, he suggests to **end the state of impunity**. First, it is important to identify the people who commit attacks and to punish them under law. Second, the state should imitate some sort of special protection for journalists.

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12   IREX Media Sustainability Report Index on Macedonia 2017: https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2017-macedonia.pdf

TAMARA CHAUSIDIS is the president of the Trade Union of Macedonian Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM). She has more than 25 years of professional experience as an editor and me dia freedom activist.

Chausidis gave an insight by talking about the major obstacles that journalists face in their daily routine of work. She opened the discussion with a personal example. After working for the private broadcaster *Alsat-M* for several years, she got fired because of her union activities. Regarding her management, she got told, "you can stay at work, but first you must quit as a leader of the Trade Union of Macedonian Journalists and Media Workers (**SSNM**)".

Chausidis underlined that one of the strategies to control the media, implemented through media owners loyal to the government, was to exclusively employ young and unexperienced journalists. The reason behind this is that young journalists are easy to manipulate and to be forced to practice self-censorship. "There is a culture of impunity and a culture of fear in Macedonia", Chausidis states. The government rules literally through the media." By this they manage to strengthen their ruling. Another key problem, when media workers are in question, is the **culture of impunity** and **cyberbullying**. A phenomenon's that resulted in instigating the culture of fear. "Prominent media figures and critical voices are increasingly endangered by this," Chausidis said.

"A recent survey shows that almost **55% of interviewed journalists practice self-censorship** whilst more than 60% are subjected to or have witnessed **direct censorship.** Also, about half of the members of SSNM are secret members because they are afraid to be known as a member of the union," Chausidis said in the interview.

One of the trends of **undermining solidarity** under journalists was the opening of **parallel organisations** (like a second media ethics council). A parallel trade union, with close links to the former government, was introduced, with the main goal to undermine the unity and network of journalists.

Focusing on the recent attacks, Chausidis stated that the establishment is ruling through media outlets and with the help of the media. In a **highly polarised society** with a culture of fear, bullying, physical attacks, and impunity are a present situation in Macedonia. However, those incidents are proportionally low compared to cyberbullying. Especially prominent media figures and critical voices are more endangered by this cyberbullying phenomenon.

She expects that the ongoing changes in the political sphere will be reflected in the media market also. Although every political party sees media as a tool and an obedient slave, it cannot be worse with the new government, Chausidis argues, having in mind the previous Government practices and the **selective use of the law**.

As possible measures to overcome this critical situation, Chausidis mentioned the collective protection/ collective union agreement within the media. In addition, she sees a clear need to reinstate integrity in the journalistic profession. Chausidis also stated that international institutions should be clearer in their messages and should put aside their "diplomatic language". Economic rights of journalists could be a starting point to unify a disunited profession. Salaries and the working conditions are a common ground for all journalists to seat down and talk, Chausidis ended.

The delegates in front of the Ministry of Interior in Skopje (*Ilcho Cvetanoski, Ricardo Gutierrez, Nora Wehofsits, Katharina Mikulcak, Mitja Mersol, Naser Selmani – left to right*)

AGIM NUHIU, is a member of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and then Minister of Interior in the VMRO – DPMNE coalition government. Today is holding the position of deputy Minister of Interior in the new SDSM – DUI led government. Nuhiu has a PhD in Law and worked in several positions ovf regional and central administrations.

Talking about recent attacks on media workers, he mentioned that close communication and cooperation between the Association of Journalist of Macedonia (ZNM) president Naser Selmani and him started right after the February assault of the news website A1on crew.[13]

Soon after, thanks to video surveillance, one of the suspects was found and the Ministry pressed charges against. This cooperation resulted in more close cooperation between the Ministry and ZNM. The incident is a **rare case where the police has identified the attackers.**

During the meeting, Minister Nuhiu himself stated that the **"lack of political will"** for further and deeper proceeding of the attacks on journalists is a major issue. He also underlined that in the cases where media workers are targeted there is intentionally unprofessional work by the responsible institutions – the police, the judiciary etc. "There are cases when pro-government journalists were attacked and the police immediately intervened. But if the attack is against critical media the situation is opposite," Nuhiu said.

Nuhiu emphasized that cases where pro-government journalists have been attacked and the police would immediately intervene, are an example of his claims. The situation would be completely different if the attack was against media that is critical on the government. In those cases, the prompt reaction would be lacking as the responsible institutions would be passive resolving these incidents.

"We agreed that there should be no impunity. Therefore we are re-opening old cases," Minster Nuhiu said at the end of the meeting. So far, several months after the meeting with the FFM delegation, there are no results.

GORAN GAVRILOV, is the director and owner of the private national radio station 'Kanal 77' based in the town of Stip.

Gavrilov shed a light on the political and economic pressure on the critical media outlets. He described his radio station as a critical outlet and therefore as amongst those media that have not received any money from the rising awareness campaigns funded by the previous government.

Elaboration on the media empire that was created in the previous years by the preceding government using close businessmen to buy or open media outlets that will report favourable on them, they wanted to by his radio station as one of most influential in the state.

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13   Two unidentified protesters assaulted journalist Aleksandar Todevski and cameraperson Vladimir Zhelcheski during the protest in the capital Skopje. Todevski and Zhelcheski were hit and kicked in the back whilst their camera was damaged – see testimony below.

Beside the direct pressures on him to sell his station, Gavrilov also spoke about the problems that originate from the overcrowded market. He focused his observation claiming that the biggest problem of the market is that most of the media owners have different businesses and media are not their primary business. They use and invest some of the profit from their parallel businesses in the media. By this, they aim to use the media as a tool for advancing their primary businesses.

"**At the moment we need two services, but we have five national radio stations**," Gavrilov said. This is one of the biggest problems. We have to find a way to be professional and to be sustainable in the same time. If we invest in professional journalism that will change the standard, people would see the difference between professional and unprofessional journalism in a short time.

About physical assaults he said, that back in the 90s he was beaten several times. His son was arrested and his car was torched. Now, things are slightly different - **"violence is a tool of the 90s, today the pressure is more subtle,"** he concludes. From his point of view the solution for the chaotic media market and the bad overall situation would be a "**total reset**"/revoking of the licences whilst **"promoting quality journalism"** in the same time.

VLADIMIR ZHELCHESKI and Aleksandar Todevski are working for the news website A1on. Todevski is a journalist and Zhelcheski a cameraperson. Both are relatively young journalists, at the beginning of their professional career. The outlet that they are working for is a small one with around six people in total. Two unidentified protesters assaulted them during the protest in the capital Skopje. Aleksandar and Vladimir were hit with a fist and kicked in the back whilst their camera was damaged. Incident happened in front of the parliament on 28 February 2017.

Two protesters assaulted Todevski and Zhelchesk during a pro-government demonstration, on February 28 2017, in front of the Assembly. During the incident, their camera was destroyed. As they both emphasised during the interviews with the delegation, they were attacked because the outlet they are working for is critical towards the government.

Talking on the premises of ZNM they both started to describe the assault whilst explaining what led to the incident. They define the media landscape as **"highly divided along political lines"**. The situation is the same within the society which they describe as heavily politicized along political party lines. For all this, they are pointing their finger at the political parties as being solely responsible.

Once the pro-governmental protesters saw their press cards or got the information for whom they were working, they immediately attacked. "We were probably attacked just because we didn't cover the news the way the party asked from us," Zhelcheski said. Adding that "the attack didn't happen by accident but that it was intentionally." Critical media outlets were directly targeted, it seemed. "While we were filming, some protester asked us for whom we worked for. I said: show me some ID. If you are with the police, will let you know who we work for. Three seconds later I was knock down. First I was hit with the fist on the head. A couple of moments later I was unconscious," Vladimir Zhelcheski said.

His colleague, Aleksandar Todevski, noticed that during the pro-opposition protests that were held in previous years and earlier this year, there was much more police force on the streets. However, during recent pro-governmental protests, there weren't many troops on the streets. After the incident, I started shouting "police, help, help, police", and then they came, Todevski underlined. Consequently, after the incident, A1on employees decided not to cover the demonstrations anymore due to risks and the missing protection through authorities.

This was not the first incident the both got involved. A couple of months ago, together with another crew from TV 21, they were barred from recording whilst attacked by private security personnel. "There was police present at the scene but they did nothing to stop the attack or to protect us," Zhelcheski and Todevski underlined.

According to Todevski and Zhelchesk, incidents like this, when critical media are targeted, have become the normal. But unfortunately, the **justice system is too slow** to follow the cases and is rarely put into practice. "We believe that the public prosecutors should proceed with cases like this and do their job. We are just asking for justice," Aleksandar Todevski said. In a very rare outcome, the police thanks to the video surveillance identified one of the attackers. However, other perpetrators are still unknown.

ZORAN TRAJCHEVSKI, is the director of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS), the oldest regulatory body in the Balkans. He was elected to the post in October 2014. One year earlier in March 2013, Trajchevski obtained his Ph.D. in Economic Sciences, from the Faculty of Economy and Engineering Management in Novi Sad, Republic of Serbia.

According to Trajchevski, the business **connections between media owners and political centres** are one of the key problems in Macedonian media. For many media owners, their outlet is not their primary business but solely a tool for advancing their businesses.

He also raised the question of the awareness campaigns and their role in capturing the media. **Government advertisements** are one way to influence the editorial policy. The condition for getting money is simple – if a media outlet is close with the ruling parties and inform in their favour they will get advertisements.

Tracing the source of the problem, Trajchevski locates its roots in the period from 1992 to 1997 when there was no media law and many media licences were granted. According to him, in just one election year, the then prime minister issued 180 licences with the intention to weaken the media.

It should not be allowed to shut down a media outlet by political decision, said Trajchevski, adding that the idea of revoking all licences and then start from scratch could be considered.

"An independent experts group should further analyse how many broadcasters we really need in our country. But to achieve that we need a strong political will from both political sides – from the ruling parties and from the opposition," the director of the AVMS stated.

Elaborating on other issues Trajchevski mentioned that the lack of journalistic integrity and insufficient respect for ethical and professional standards are also an issue. "I think we also should have an authority to issue fines for hate speech," he underlined.

MARINA TUNEVA, is a long time NGO activist and a lecturer at the school of journalism and public relations in Skopje. She is recently executive director of the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia.

Marina Tuneva underlined that the high percentage of press related complaints from journalists against other journalists and by the civil society against pro-government propaganda is just another example for the **high polarisation of the society.** During their work, they noticed that besides having a political agenda some of the journalists also have problems with **biased reporting, hate speech**, and of **mixing facts with opinion**.

As an example for the low ethical standards, Tuneva pointed out that their Charta for Ethical Reporting was accepted and signed by 96 outlets just to be infringed by some of them on the very next day.

Similar to what happened to other professional organisations, like ZNM and SSNM, people close to the former ruling parties created a **parallel organisation** called *Independent Media Ethics Council* (mentioned above). But the organization was never active in practice. This is a well-known strategy for undermining the authority and diversifying the support, membership, and influence.

From her point of view, most journalists are aware of the professional ethics but they cannot practice them because of the obstructions by the editors.

In talking about the recent attacks on journalist and what needs to be done to end these difficult conditions, Tuneva is clear at pointing her finger at the institutions. "The state and its institutions are responsible for the protection of journalists. They are the ones that have to take adequate actions to protect them. The facts are clear. All incidents are reported and the ZNM has recorded them all. I think that the state should be more proactive in protecting the journalists."

Tuneva also described the lack of political will in the past to resolve this kind of incidents or to advance the protection of journalists. However, recently the president of the ZNM got a meeting with the Minister of the Interior. "With the new government we expect changes and a higher political will for resolving the bad media working conditions," Tuneva adds.

SASHO ORDANOVSKI, is an awarded journalist with a professional career that spans over 30 years. He used to be the editor-in-chief and director of the public broadcaster MRT, the co-founder of the weekly news Forum magazine and research oriented NGO Forum – Center for Strategic Research and Documentation. Ordanovski is lately more prominent as columnist and political analyst then as a journalist.

Elaborating on the political situation and the reasons for the drastic deterioration of media freedom in Macedonia, Ordanovski clearly stated that journalists are subject to **constant pressure and maltreatment**. "Journalists here are confused, they are in a bad social situation, and they are subjects to various kinds of pressures and mal-treatments," as Ordanovski stated at the very beginning of the interview.

According to Ordanovski, the media market is falling apart due to the total mis-use of the state of affairs by the former ruling parties. "They captured the state and completely politicised the administration." Ordanovski explains and adds that the previous government also worked on full control of the public narrative. For that to be successfully achieved they needed to control the media. If it was not possi-ble to control influential journalists/columnists/political analysts with money, then they would use techniques that are more blatant such as forms of **intimidation and threats.**

Analysing the techniques used by the pro-government media and politicians, Or-danovski said that by painting critical voices as traitors they actually stimulate at-tacks: "He/she is a traitor and he/she should be…" etc.

He described the media market as demolished and unsustainable by itself. As an example he pointed out that in recent years, there were **no new journalism stu-dents** on the law faculty in Skopje.

"The media system is falling apart. When I say falling apart I refer to the market, regulations, education, ethical standards, and business as such," Ordanovski said, adding that the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (ZNM) will try to consolidate the situation through transparent discussions with the new Government. But he also adds that the media workers, and the general public, should be fully aware that the situation cannot be fixed in a day, and that it will take years to achieve some change.

To break the present deadlock one of the first measures Ordanovski recommends to his fellow journalists is to be **united and become members of ZNM**. The organ-isation, as the oldest and most respected association among media workers, was targeted by the previous Government. They tried to undermine its reputation and introduce disunity. It partly succeeded by creating, together with their proxy media workers, a parallel professional organisations. There is parallel organisation to every professional association. Fortunately this was with limited success.

His advice for colleagues is to work on developing mechanisms for protection and the raise of solidarity. One of the ideas is establishment of special insurance for professionals. In any incident that involves media workers, Ordanovski advises his fellow journalists to always inform ZNM so they can easily spread the word to all international associations more easily.

Just like some of the other interviewees he pointed out that the sharp decline of media freedom coincides with the reign (from 2008 till beginning of 2017) of the previous coalition government.

"I will illustrate this through a nice story. In May 2015 in the middle of the night they put a bomb under my car. Everyone knows who did it, I know who did it, but you cannot prove it. My car is one of the dozens burnt-out cars in Macedonia. Many of them were owned by journalists," Ordanovski said and went on to explain how it is done.

"They have people in the jail, younger people, in their twenties or thirties, who are there with several charges or let's say convictions for possessing drugs. So, they say to them: "This weekend a car will come and three of you will go and burn this car. If you do that one of your charges will be deleted."

Concluding the statement Ordanovski said that "eventually one day, if the state decides to deal with this, somebody will choose to speak to the media and clarify the whole situation."

PETRIT SARACINI, is a well-known NGO activist with a focus on media freedom. In the period during the MMF mission he was working as the programme coordinator and content producer for the NGO Civil – Centre for Freedom from Skopje. After the establishment of the new government, Saracini is working as special adviser to the newly appointed Minister of culture.

The key problem in the media sphere, Saracini described, is the present media market, which is founded in **clientelism** and a weak media market. According to Saracini, the influence in the media in general is driven through the states advertisements and should be taken down. In addition, it is not about legislation, but about the **implementation of existing laws**. Hate speech, he described, is a good example for this. Although there is a provision in the criminal code, there is not a single case in the courts.

Impunity, combined with the **lack of political will**, is one of the main problems, Saracini points out too. It is responsibility of the state's officials to put an end to this practice.

"For example, only one of about 45 incidents in 2016 have been solved – the attack on TV Telma journalist in front of Ministry of Interior" Saracini said.

He underlines that the criminal and civil justice systems do not deal effectively with threats and violence against journalists. As already mentioned in the ZNM report, Saracini sees the missing implementation of media protection laws and no prosecution of the perpetrators as a risk for journalists being targeted. For Petrit Saracini, political will is the key.

"Impunity and the lack of a fair implementation of the legislation are amongst the main problems that are undermining the freedom of media in the country," Saracini said.

He also focused on the **polarisation inside the media community**. Saracini described the polarization by saying that "on one side there are journalists and on the other side there are propagandists." Continuing in a slightly positive tone he

underlined that the "time of crises are windows of new opportunities". And for that to happen, for changes to be introduced, the political will is key factor.

"For any of the three key pillars that could lead to change in the society – media, education, and the rule of law – there must be political will," Saracini concluded.

As one of the possible solutions for the current situation, he sees the **introduction of media literacy in the curriculum**.

"Media literacy could be possible measure for counterbalancing propaganda and other manipulations in the public sphere." It should be introduced into the educational system as a compulsory component of the mother tongue as soon as possible. "But for this to happen it also needs political will", Saracini ended.

ARBEN ZEQIRI, is an investigative journalist working for the private national broadcaster TV Senja .

During the interview, Zeqiri focused mainly on the problems that investigative journalists face in the current state of Macedonia. He told the delegates that one of the main problems for investigative journalism are **closed and non-collaborative sources of information**. This goes for most of the official institutions, regardless of their duty for transparency and freedom of access to information.

"Quite often - when journalists criticise one party they blame him or her as a supporter or as someone working for the competing party. This is an evident example of the lacking culture and the **shrinking space for objective criticism**. Quite often political parties are boycotting critical media," Zeqiri said.

He thinks that **impunity combined with the hostile environment caused by the politicians' speeches are the main reason for attacks on journalists**. This is targeting only critical media while the pro-government media are empowered by the ruling elites although they are constantly breaching the ethical and professional code.

Another interesting fact raised by Zeqiri is his observation that most of the victims are quite often young journalists. According to him, the idea behind this is to break them from the very start and to show them who is the boss to consequently force them into **self-censorship.**

One of the possible solutions are international stakeholders, which pressure institutions and political parties in Macedonia. Recent examples are Zeqiri's difficulties with the former main Albanian ethnic party in Macedonia: DPA.[14] As he explained, he was harassed and constantly banned from their press conferences as a punishment for a critical article.

"After pressure from Dutch and US embassy, the DPA changed their attitude. The party stopped to boycott me and sent out invitations for press conferences again," Zeqiri said.

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14   The Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) is one of the oldest ethnic Albanian parties in Macedonia headquartered in the northwestern town of Tetovo. It currently holds two seats in the Macedonian parliament.

SASHE IVANOVSKI, citizen journalist and owner of the news website Politiko. Electromechanical engineer by training, but journalist by vocation. In recent years, Ivanovski became one of the most vocal critics of the government and controversial public figures. His reporting style is considered as a form of the so called "citizen and guerrilla journalism".

Ivanovski is a controversial representative of citizen journalism in Macedonia. Fellow journalists and ministers from the previous government describe him as a continuous target of physical attacks. The most notable incident happened in July 2015, when Vladimir Peshevski, the then Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, physically assaulted him. Ivanovski, as it can be seen on a [video,](#) approaches Peshevski while recording with his mobile phone, to ask him about the wiretapping scandal. An incident that was quite important and prominent at that time in Macedonia. In the video Peshevski turns around to attack Ivanovski in front of a cafe bar in Skopje. While a day earlier, a colleague from the private national broadcaster Sitel [assaulted](#) Ivanovski as well.

Considered by the public as a controversial and not a traditional journalist, Ivanovski is fully aware of his status.

"Traditional and conventional media does not like my style because it is too provocative," he said proudly. One of the main problems of the recent media sphere in the Republic of Macedonia is that the mainstream media have a "boring style". "Their style is very classical, conservative, a boring one and that is the reason why nobody is watching them," Ivanovski concluded.

Being an owner of a small online media outlet – a "one-man show" project – he emphasized that one of the main problems for journalists in the Republic of Macedonia is on how to get **funding for independent projects**.

"I have not found a solution for that problem yet. For example, I receive funds from business partners but mostly under the table. Usually, I receive a funding without to be obliged to advertise for their businesses in return. If they give me money for advertisement, they will have problems with the government," Ivanovski said.

According to him, the change of the government will bring positive changes for all of the media community. "I am absolutely sure that they will not interfere in the media business model," Ivanovski said.

SASHO DIMOVSKI, is well-established journalist with more than 30 years of working experience for different media outlets and different platforms.

"There is a direct **link between the editors and the ruling political parties** and it is one of the best ways to influence the media," Dimovski started to describe the media landscape in Macedonia.

He points out that all you have to do to influence media outlets is to have the owner and the editor under your control. That is what the former government used to do during their time in office. Dimovski did emphasise this conclusion with a personal example. A manager of the state news agency MIA told him in an open conversation

that as long as the government is their main financier, they would have work as they get told.

"Internal policy is that no critical articles on the government are allowed in the agency," Dimovski said. Adding that "parts of his colleagues believe in the government propaganda whilst the others are keeping their head low for social security and pay check."

The huge cleavage in the profession can be seen with the fact that even the attacks on journalists are not covered by the agency. Political pressure influences most of the journalists in Macedonia. From security issues – the deep polarisation was used to alienate the critical journalists which in the bottom line motivated the latest attacks then to the sharp decrease of trust in media – up to the loss of integrity in the media sector overall. Consequently, the misuse of the media develops an atmosphere of distrust in the public[15].

"Not only people but also journalists are divided along political lines. They should rather be united and stand behind the ethical standards for a better journalism," Dimovski said. He added that "people with integrity" should manage the media.

FATMIR ALIU, *is the editor-in-chief of the new, mainly Albanian language, broadcaster TV 21. As a Pristina based TV station they are comparatively new in the media market and started airing in September 2015.*

In order to survive as a journalist in Macedonia, you **need to be affiliated to a political party**, Aliu stated clearly at the very start of the interview. Consequently, there is a lack of honest journalism and genuine reporting in Macedonia, which he describes as a big issue.

"Nowadays there are a lot of fake and propaganda news", Aliu said.

He underlines that one of the main tools by the former coalition government to control the media was the **vilification of journalists** and calling them names such as "Sorosoid/Sorosoids".[16] The term usually discredits non-government affiliated groups and ads to the feeling of journalists to understand violence as an everyday business.

As the editor-in-chief of a new TV channel that aims to establish an audience in the Macedonian media market, he points out to several business irregularities that undermine media business and professional journalism. For example, in order to attract businesses to advertise in your media outlet you need a big audience. Here, Aliu mentions the monopoly of the organization that is issuing people meters, audience measurement, whilst questioning their results reliability.

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15   In absence of recent and coherent research on trust in media in Macedonia there are several researches that could back Dimovski's claim. Research from 2014 underlines that 47% of young people in Macedonia consider media untrustworthy. A recent IRI research on public opinion in Macedonia showed that 26% of the people consume political news from friends or family.

16   Sorosoid/Sorosoids – an umbrella term used to label, discredit and derogate a certain group of people, most often NGO activists. It was also used to describe everybody who is critical of the previous government. The term has its origin in the last name of the Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros, the founder of the Open Society Foundation.

Stating several cases where TV 21 aired exclusive material (soap opera, sport match etc.) and had lowest share of all TV stations made no sense to him. Establishing a **fair play rules** inside the media business is one of the crucial things that needs to be done in the media sphere, Aliu concluded.

ALEKSANDRA TEMENUGOVA AND ZHANETA TRAJKOVSKA, are long time NGO activists, educators, and media freedom advocates. Temenugova is the head of 'Journalism Study Program at School of Journalism and Public Relations in Skopje', whilst Trajkovska is 'Director of the School of Journalism and Public Relations' based in the capital Skopje.

Focusing on the need of media literacy as necessary tool to advance journalism and to combat media propaganda, Temenugova observed that people slowly start to understand its importance. As a step forward to introduce media literacy at schools, *'Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMU)'* established a coalition of NGOs working for the **promotion of media and information literacy** in the country.

"We desperately need to educate the public," Temenugova pointed out. However, with the experience in former years, Temenugova is cautious. There were similar initiatives in the past but because of a lack of **political will**, nothing has been implemented.

Temenugova has a completely opposite stance on the widespread idea that journalist are lacking education and training. She underlined that journalists are actually "fed up" with education, seminars, and trainings. It is rather about being able to put this knowledge into practice: "Journalist are educated and know the professional and ethical standards. But they cannot implement them as they keep the integrity of their profession to the editors and their interference," Temenugova said. Adding to that, all this produces a climate and culture of self-censorship.

Trajkovska, who joined the interview at a later stage, concluded that the government has been working on creating the image that **critical journalists are the enemies of the state**. As a possible solution, she pointed out to the need to deny legitimacy to **shady and parallel existing organisations** by calling them on panels.

With this concern, she especially addressed international organisations, to stop advocating for professional organisations to sit on one table and discuss the issues in the profession with these other organisations.

"Pluralism in the media market does not mean to give legitimacy to fake organisations that have nothing in common with professional and ethical journalism," Trajkovska said. From her point of view, government backed organisations are absolute unacceptable for most of professional or critical journalists.

DIMITAR TANUROV, reporter for online Meta News Agency, who was attacked during the storming of the parliament on the 27th of April 2017 and then interviewed for the ECPMF at a later stage, after the on-site mission was concluded. .

The attack on journalists during the storming of the parliament on the 27th of April 2017, is the latest incident in the long list of politically motivated incidents. Among the most seriously injured journalists was Dimitar Tanurov, a reporter for the online Meta News Agency. In an interview for the ECPMF after the mission already conducted on-site, he concluded that **politically motivated anti-media rhetoric** and the **lack of political will** to act against such incidents are the seed ground for such difficult environment.

During the storming of the parliament, Tanurov took pictures of the storming inside the building. Suddenly, a group of protesters rapidly started to beat and kick him, while calling him a traitor. Right after the incident, Tanurov wrote on his personal Facebook profile, that protesters attacked him when they saw his press card and the name of the outlet he is working for.

"They took my phone, and continued to beat and kick me while I was lying on the ground," Tanurov told the ECPMF. Another journalist that was heavily attacked during the storming was Nikola Ordevski, a cameraperson with the Makfax news agency. Ordevski was hospitalised and treated for concussion.

Conclusion

The Freedom of Speech is an essential part in any democratic society and consequently stated as one article in *European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).* The article in the ECHR does not only guarantees everyone the right to freedom of expression. It also underlines the importance of the right to the "freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority". Article 1 of the *European Charter on Freedom of the Press,* which plays a significant part in the ECPMFs Code of Conduct, states that the "freedom of the press is essential to a democratic society. To uphold and protect it, and to respect its diversity and its political, social and cultural missions, is the mandate of all governments". Consequently, *independent,* pluralistic, and responsible journalism are of immense importance for a healthy democratic society. Aspects that become significant especially in such multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies such as in Macedonia.

Final press conference of the mission to Macedonia (Mitja Mersol, Katharina Mikulcak, interpreter Kristina Naceva, Nora Wehofsits, Ricardo Gutierrez – from left to right)

In putting together the mission's main findings through conducted interviews with several media outlets, NGOs, and political stakeholders, the delegation took into account reports on the current media situation in Macedonia and analysed a list of incidents. Most interviewees for this report described the working areas in which they faced threats, attacks, and other types of intimidation and interferences with their work. Whilst others emphasised their perspectives on the freedom of the press/media and its main challenges in the Republic of Macedonia.

The pretext for assaults on journalists was created, imposed, and supported by the previous government and disseminated by the pro-government media. By constantly vilifying and calling critical voices "enemies of the state", whilst putting an equal sign between the party and the state, this paved the road for incidents like the one during the storming of the parliament. During the mission, interviewees claimed that the pro-government protesters are targeting media workers who were critical towards previous government's policies or who disagree with their public narrative. The constant vilification of critical voices combined with "a culture of impunity", as Tamara Chausidis stated, is a highly explosive combination. Criminal defamation was repealed in Macedonia in 2012 but regardless of that, selective justice and impunity continue to be one of the key issues, alongside vilification and hate speech against journalist, that are undermining the media sphere.

The society in Macedonia is highly polarised predominantly along the political line. This was emphasized by several international governmental and non-governmental organization in their reports and full supported by several interviewees (Chausidis, Todevski and Zhelcheski, Tuneva, Saracini amongst other). This omnipresent polarisation is constantly reflecting, influencing, altering and endangering media workers on daily basis. This is also visible by quantifying mapped incidents on mapping media freedom (MMF) website. Amongst predominant cases of attacks on critical/oppositional voices, there are also several incidents on the MMF map showing how pro-oppositional protesters or party supporters were harassing/threatening/bullying pro-government media workers or public broadcaster journalists. This

happened to a smaller extent both in numbers and size of the incidents. But none-theless, it shows how deep the political division is. And to what extent the vilification of the media workers along the political lines can result in threatening situations.

Political support for better protection is a precondition of putting an end to the impunity of attacks against journalists in Macedonia. As testimonies underline, almost all interviewees emphasised the lack of political will as one of the key problems and key reasons for creating a toxic media atmosphere. Even the Minister of Interior, Agim Nuhiu (DIU), stated that there is an intentional lack of political will, which hinders further proceedings of incidents as describes above.

From the gathered testimonies, it seems obvious that the previously governing parties (VMRO-DPMNE and DUI) used state institutions in order to limit the critical voices and to control the media. To ensure this, the coalition set up complex, sophisticated mechanisms and methods, policies and legal provisions, up to blatant threats, vilification and pressure. This process was motivated and established in accordance with the above-mentioned theoretical framework on "preoccupation of modernised authoritarian leaders with information." According to the missions' findings, backed by the interviewees' statements during the testimonials, and partner organizations previous researches[17] the complex set of inter-dependent mechanisms has resulted in:

- creating clientelistic ties with the influential media by misusing government advertisements for rewarding outlets loyal to the parties;

- undermining professional standards by fostering parallel journalistic organisations, provoking and supporting disunity in the profession, and vilifying critical voices;

- Muzzling freedom of expression by misusing state apparatus and detaining journalists.

In such kind of surrounding state institutions and political stakeholders take no real responsibility for the protection of journalists. Having brought all of this to the attention the delegation drafted a list of issues that are fostering or provoking the rise of violent incidents against journalists:

- The political climate, anti-media rhetoric and a polarisation along the political line which lead to a highly unsafe environment for journalists;

- There is no political will to ensure conditions for a free and independent journalism. State institutions and political stakeholders take no responsibility for the protection of journalists;

- The criminal and civil justice systems do not deal effectively and in timely manner with threats and acts of violence against journalists producing and supporting climate in which journalist are seen as an easy target.[18]

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17   ZNM and WBRP 2016 report "Indicators on the level of media freedom and journalists' safety". More details can be seen at: http://znm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Indicators-on-the-level-of-media-free-dom-and-journalists-safety-2016.pdf

18   Ibid.

Recommendations[19]

To conclude the report, the delegation, consisting of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, the European Federation of Journalists, the South East Europe Media Organisation, and the Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa, would like to give the following recommendations to the newly elected government of the Republic of Macedonia, authorities and journalists in the country, the Macedonian Association of Journalists, as well as to the international and European community.

To the Macedonian government and authorities:

- Political stakeholders should publicly and unequivocally condemn all attacks against journalists and media outlets regardless of their editorial policy. Politicians need to ensure an environment in which media professionals can work free from intimidation is of utmost importance;

- Politicians should refrain from spreading hateful rhetoric against journalists that incites violence and stop the practice of portraying journalists as partisan and unreliable, including accusations of being foreign agents and therefore disloyal to the country;

- Macedonian authorities must conduct effective and efficient investigations of every single case of an attack on the physical safety and integrity of journalists. We call on the judiciary and all responsible authorities to stop the ongoing impunity;

- Politicians and authorities shall respect the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) which includes freedom of speech;

- The current and newly elected government and the opposition must comply with Macedonia's commitment to protect journalism and to guarantee internet freedom.

- Without any delay, the Macedonian authorities must implement the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on safety of journalists (Recommendation 2016-4) and on internet freedom (Recommendation 2016-5), adopted on 13 April 2016.

- For any reform in the media sector to come the Macedonian authorities must consult the legitimate national organisations promoting media freedom and independent journalism: the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM), the Association of Journalists (ZNM), and the Trade Union of Journalists (SSNM);

- Political and institutional stakeholders should build and promote an efficient system for punishment of hate speech;

- Authorities should subsequently introduce media and news literacy.

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19   The recommendations are based on the fact-finding mission observations and previous researches by partner organizations like ZNM and WBRP 2016 report "Indicators on the level of media freedom and journalists' safety". More details can be seen at: http://znm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Indicators-on-the-level-of-media-freedom-and-journalists-safety-2016.pdf

To the journalists and media workers:

- We also call on all journalists to take their role as watchdogs seriously. We encourage them to report and file complains if they are attacked, intimidated or harassed. They should stand in solidarity with their colleagues, cooperate and support each other;

- Report incidents to the local and international media associations and file the incidents on the regional and international media freedom platforms (safe journalists, mapping media freedom, CEO platform);

- Use local and international remedies such as the MLDI project for eventual court cases and trials;

- Working on increasing the integrity and professionalism of media workers;

- Challenge hate speech in the media, internet, but most of all between journalists;

To Macedonian journalists' organisations:

- Work and promote self-regulation;

- Strengthen professional solidarity and integrity;

- Promote quality journalism;

- Work closely with journalists on the timely reporting of attacks and incidents against them.

To the international and European community:

- European institutions such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE should not only closely monitor the situation of journalists in Macedonia but use its soft power and influence to help implement the necessary reforms;

- International organisations should use every opportunity to remind political stakeholders of their obligation concerning media freedom;

- The international community should provide assistance and other support to relevant authorities and media organisations whilst offering training and educational opportunities for media workers;

- The international community should conduct monitoring missions when needed with the focus on media freedom and the implementation of recommendations.