

Media monitoring - Analysis of media content related to good governance

February 2019

 **ActionSEE**



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the partners of the project and do not reflect the views of the European Union.

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација
Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски",
Скопје

316.774:061.2]:351(497.7)"2018/19"(047.31)

MEDIA monitoring [Електронски извор] : analysis of media content
related to good governance. - Skopje : Metamorphosis, 2019

Начин на пристап (URL): <https://www.metamorphosis.org.mk>. - Текст во
PDF Формат, содржи 14 стр. - Наслов преземен од екранот. - Опис на
изворот на ден 16.05.2019. - Фусноти кон текстот

ISBN 978-608-263-006-9

а) Медиуми - Граѓански сектор - Добро владеење - Македонија -
2018-2019

- Истражувања

COBISS.MK-ID 110382602

PUBLISHED BY:

Metamorphosis, Foundation for Internet and Society

Metamorphosis's mission is to contribute to the
development of democracy and increase the quality
of life through innovative use and sharing of
knowledge. Our guiding values are openness,
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ACTION SEE

ACTION SEE (Accountability, Technology and Institutional Openness Network in the South East Europe region) is a network of civil society organizations that jointly work on promoting and ensuring government accountability and transparency in the region of South-East Europe, raising the potential for civic activism and civic participation, promoting and protecting human rights and freedoms on the Internet and building capacities and interest within civil society organizations and individuals in the region in using technology in democracy promotion work.

The core members of the network are Metamorphosis Foundation for Internet and Society from North Macedonia, Center for Democratic Transition from Montenegro, Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability from Serbia and CA Why Not from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

ACTION SEE works with partners from Albania MJAFT and from Kosovo Open Data Kosovo, well as partners from other countries in Europe and the world.

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for Internet and Society**

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Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Great Britain

www.wfd.org

**CRTA - Center for Research,
Transparency and Accountability**

Serbia

www.crt.rs

Citizens Association Why not?

Bosnia and Herzegovina

www.zastone.ba

Center for Democratic Transition

Montenegro

www.cdtmn.org

Open Data Kosovo (ODK)

Kosovo

www.opendatakosovo.org

Levizja Mjaft!

Albania

www.mjaft.org

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INTRODUCTION

This analysis aims to provide an overview of the manner of media reporting on good governance, transparency, and accountability and the type of undertaken civil initiatives, i.e., covered project topics. It also seeks to detect the type of changes caused by the media reporting on those topics at the level of policies, legislative amendments or public debates organization with the aim to spur amendments in terms of legislation or change certain conditions through civic activism.

Therefore, it is safe to say that **the media play a vital role in the development of democratic processes and the situations related to good governance in the country and the region as well.** With their reporting, media outlets contribute daily to changes in the manner of implementing policies nationally and locally, such as the case with the examples available further in this analysis: cleaner environment, health, and spending of public money.

Taking into account that such analyses have also been drafted in the ACTION SEE project partner states, the conclusions of this kind refer to the regional state of affairs with media as well.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis covers media content (both online and print) published in the period between May 2018 - January 2019.

Good governance is defined by principles and indicators that have been already used in the ACTION SEE project developed as Regional Openness Index as well as by keywords and definitions of the principles of transparency, openness, accountability in good governance, responsibility and good governance, effectiveness, and efficiency used for this analysis:

Transparency

Transparency rests on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions, and information are directly accessible to the stakeholders. It provides sufficient information to allow stakeholders to understand and follow institutions and processes through participation in open administration initiatives. It is assumed that the public is regularly informed about all activities of the institutions, Government, agencies, courts, and spending of public money, and that information on public procurement and annexes to public procurement contracts is published regularly.

Openness

The right to access to public information is used effectively and efficiently, and citizens can access freely and partake in the public consultations as a process of inclusion and openness of institutions.

Accountability in good governance

Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders. Information available to the public is published in a way so that every citizen can access it, there is openness of data of public interest and regular publication of reports on the work of institutions.

Responsibility

Integrity forms part of good governance viewed as good conduct within the working environment by implementing Codes of Ethics and professionalizing the civil servants, quality control of operations and good managing of institutions. The prevention of conflict of interest is part of each civil servant's/ functionary's integrity.

Rule of law

Legal frameworks ought to be fair and implemented unbiasedly.

Good governance

According to western theoreticians, "good governance" is the sharing of decision-making authorization, so the power and resources will not be accumulated in the hands of an individual or a group.

In the public sector, good governance is based on the system of checks and balances of the branches of government (legislative, executive, and judicial). It is deemed that it includes a process of regular consultation between government bodies and the general public, so the authorities are held accountable by the citizens for their trust, and they guarantee to serve to their interests.

Good governance

Legal frameworks ought to be fair and implemented unbiasedly.

The situation with media in society and the role of various civil sector initiatives and activities

Media outlets play a key role in the changes and support of the reform processes in society. They inspire questions concerning the public, but new topics of public interest have to be opened both locally and nationally. Several such initiatives supported by the media and civil society organizations successfully raised the awareness of citizens and institutions regarding the change of state of affairs.

CLEANER ENVIRONMENT - activism to fight big polluters

Environment pollution was often in the focus of media and civil activists, and it is a hot topic in winter when pollution levels are the highest. In winter, the pressure for institutional accountability is on the rise just like the promises for introducing "green policies".

Several initiatives marked the period between May 2018 - January 2019, the air pollution, the discovery of the illegal lindane landfill in Skopje, and the fight against the opening of Ilovica and Kazandol mines.

Air pollution

The media that actively cover the situation with the air pollution addressed this topic at the beginning of the 2018 heating season. By discovering the defective and dysfunctional measuring stations, Meta.mk started the media fight against air pollution¹. Additionally, new independent pollution meters² were installed as a result of civil activism, while media and activists joined forces and pressured for servicing the measuring stations as well as for developing a draft Plan for Clean Air³ and measures for its implementation on the part of the Government. A recognition of the media support in the fight to end air pollution is the decision of the Fund for Innovations and Technology that promoted five innovative projects that aim to reduce air pollution⁴.

Illegal lindane landfill in Skopje

Meta.mk discovered an illegal landfill of cancer-causing lindane in Skopje's Drachevo settlement⁵. Following the publication of the news, plenty of media outlets became interested in this topic and started investigating. The pressure of the media outlets spurred reactions of the competent institutions, thus opening multiple questions such as the accreditation of the Central Environment Laboratory⁶ that is part of the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, the construction of a fence around the illegal landfill⁷ and the ban of the Ministry of Education and Science for field trips in the area of Pelenica.⁸ As a result of the media activities, a tender procedure for cleaning the illegal landfill was announced.

Ilovica and Kazandol - potential threat to the environment

Ilovica and Kazandol are topics that have demonstrated how civil activism and cooperation with media may alert the authorities. National media covered the topic of these two mines and the threat they would impose if opened. The topic of Ilovica and the mines was massively reported during 2018. Meta.mk began covering this topic since the referendum in 2017 and reported on all activities afterward, also paying due attention to the statements and measures of the Government.⁹ Meta.mk followed all aspects of Ilovica (for example, the opinions of citizens¹⁰ and eco-activists¹¹). By doing so, it made other media outlets to open this topic and jointly remind the authorities that urgent solution is required. On the other hand, the joining of forces of NGOs and citizens against opening the Kazandol mine in Valandovo was of great importance. The continuous coverage of this topic and the Kazandol working group (a group of civil activists) amplified the pressure toward the Government and the measures that have to be undertaken. The popularity of these topics raised the public's awareness of the common good and sparked its interest into previous topics. Therefore, good governance topics within institutions, and in terms of media, were directed toward good governance of the state's common good.

HEALTH CARE - Citizens' lives endangered by inefficient ambulance vehicles and lack of medical staff

The Emergency Department should be renamed into "Old Vehicle Emergency Department" - a headline that alerted the authorities and raised awareness of the ambulance vehicles and lack of Emergency Department staff.

1. <https://tinyurl.com/yxjkhmjg>

2. <https://tinyurl.com/y6dwb2nq>

3. <https://tinyurl.com/yyqv48s>

4. <https://tinyurl.com/y6x8g9se>

5. <https://tinyurl.com/y27zak5j>

6. <https://tinyurl.com/yy3f5e74>

7. <https://tinyurl.com/y4yr9u28>

8. <https://tinyurl.com/y3xglm5e>

9. <https://tinyurl.com/y3cqk8vd>

10. <https://tinyurl.com/y2t8659m>

11. <https://tinyurl.com/yxuwfaag>

The coverage of topics concerning health and public services, reporting on the number of ambulance vehicles in the country as well as human resources, raised the question about this problem both locally and nationally. The journalistic investigations, stories, and interviews increased the visibility of and actualized the said problems concerning health care.

Ambulance vehicles, their technical malfunction and lack of Emergency Department staff

The demonstration of the real situation with the ambulance vehicles caused backlash on social media. The citizens requested Prime Minister Zoran Zaev's accountability regarding his statement made during the 2017 general elections campaign when he promised procurement of new ambulance vehicles for the Emergency Department. These reactions by the media and the citizens provoked the Government to make an adequate statement on this topic. The Ministry of Health launched a tender procedure and procured 12 new ambulance vehicles for the Emergency Department, six of which were distributed in Skopje.¹² Previously, Portalb.mk drafted an analysis on the ambulances at a national level and continued asking for an explanation on the standards that provided the grounds for Government's decision to distribute half of the new vehicles in Skopje. The Ministry of Health invoked a criterion of the World Health Organization (WHO) saying that "one ambulance vehicle should be available to 50 thousand people", but the document containing this standard was never made known. As a result of this pressure, the remaining 6 vehicles for the Emergency Department aren't distributed yet. Media outlets and their analyses initiated the need for a proportional distribution of ambulances in other cities and towns.

It all began with the consideration of the situation with health care, and with the opening of the public-private partnership issue. Concurrently with the topic of the ambulances, the media started reporting on the lack of Emergency Department staff. As a result, five people were employed in the Emergency Department¹³.

SPENDING OF PUBLIC MONEY - public officials and public money

As per the spending of public money, the media focused on the need for informing about the spending on the part of public office holders and the need for reforming the public procurement system.

With their monitoring activities on the spending and public procurements, several civil society organizations increased the visibility of these issues. The constant cooperation with media encouraged the Government to take the initiative for opening the data on the spending of public money that was followed by a press release on the Government's website.¹⁴

Media outlets demonstrated a strong interest in the spending of the executive authorities, and consequently, this topic was investigated daily. However, the accountability tool that the Government updated on its website was the one that turned heads.

The same tool - *Accountability Tool for the Expenditures of the Public Officials* that the Government has been using for some time now was also reported that the local self-government units might soon use it.

12. <https://tinyurl.com/y34aqbxr>

13. <https://tinyurl.com/y64o8x34>

14. <https://tinyurl.com/y6gbc8tv>

Consequently, it was launched at a local level as an example of good practice and commitment to accountability.¹⁵

On 17 April 2018, the Government made a decision that expands the scope of officials and appointed members of boards that have to demonstrate accountability before the public, and who also had to publish data on their websites on their expenditures for the period between 01 December 2014 - 31 May 2015 as well as 01 December 2017 - 31 May 2018, not later than 20 June 2018. This decision binds directors, deputy directors of independent state administration bodies, and bodies within ministries and Inspection Council.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the presence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the audit of the spending of public money sparked the media's most considerable interest. Representatives of the IMF performed a detailed scan on transparency regarding the spending of public money by public institutions and officials. By claiming that citizens have the right to know how and where their funds are spent, they launched their mission starting from the Budget Council. The media reported this widely and this issue gained visibility.¹⁷

15. <https://tinyurl.com/y4rzfzp6>

16. <https://tinyurl.com/yxw9fjqc>

17. <https://tinyurl.com/y5c8pz94>

Conclusion and Recommendations

Along with citizens, media play a vital role in the raising of public awareness of topics like good governance and cause changes in the state of affairs in multiple sectors. The examples are just a part of what the civil society organizations have achieved to cause advancement both in legislation and practice.

By investigating, media ought to continue covering topics related to good governance and transparency as much as possible. In addition, the media ought to be aware that they bridge the public and institutions. They know how to highlight the problems that the citizens face. On the other hand, they raise awareness of civil rights, that provokes an additional reaction and pressures the institutions. With that in mind, good governance advocacy activities of civil society organizations often achieve the desired effect when partnered with media. Through such partnerships, civil society organizations' expertise is effectively transposed to the public, it inspires civic actions and alerts the institutions.



This project is funded by the European Union



The "Accountability, Technology and Institutional Openness Network in South East Europe - ACTION SEE" project is implemented by Metamorphosis Foundation, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, CRTA - Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability, Citizens Association Why not?, Center for Democratic Transition, Open Data Kosovo (ODK) and Levizja Mjafi.