
**MEDIA'S ROLE IN MACEDONIA IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION AND
DEMOCRATIZATION**

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Abstract: This paper deals with the role of media in transitioning from a monist system to a pluralistic system with particular attention to the democratization of the country, the system and the society, and the role and function of the media in overcoming the transition challenges which undergo through the democratization process state, institutions, society and ultimately media itself. This paper also, tends to address the multicultural discourse in Macedonia as a separate policy challenge, but nevertheless as an inseparable part of their media and broadcasts. Since media can be counted as cultural objects, they also direct the biggest changes in society such as identity, the world of living and working. Media are a very important part of democratic values in a civil society. Their multicultural role and media correlation with the public should not be underestimated.

Multicultural societies are recognized by interethnic cooperation, tolerance, compromise and inter-ethnic consensus. While the media in Macedonia are used by the ruling party as an instrument of control, which in turn makes it quite difficult concrete to undertake steps than can improve their development. Attaining independence, both content and financial, professionalism, social responsibility, freedom of expression and information which are the keys to democratic values and free media.

Keywords: Media, Democratization, Transition, Macedonia, Media Impact, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

In a politico-democratic system, the media fulfill some basic functions. In the context of the social, political, and economic function, media's role is to inform and advise the society where they operate; to contribute to the creation of thought (through criticism and discussion); to create a wide range of thoughts, and so on. According to Ronnenberger (1979), the mass communication function is a "spiritual activity, which should be assessed by social systems in a highly developed and complex industrial society, rather than meeting its needs."⁵⁸⁴

According to Bauer (2006), "the world of media arises in an interaction of society, economy, and technology. The interaction of these systems thus creates a system that influences the determination of individual and collective factors both in private and public life."⁵⁸⁵ It is media the determiner that defines what a society sees and how it sees something. Thus, media are not just observers of how a society changes, but they are the main bearer of the changes that take place in a society. In short, if the media were not what they are today, the society would not be what it is today.

THE MEDIA AS CONTRIBUTORS TO CHANGES IN SOCIETY AND MEDIA DISCOURSE

The societies' situation in Macedonia is reflected in its media and in how the media work. If we analyze the media operation through ages in the Republic of Macedonia, we will see that they have adversely affected the entire society. The main factor for this negative change of society is not just the media, which are present in the state, but the state itself.

A major problem in the Republic of Macedonia is the political authoritarianism and ethnic nationalism. As these two negative phenomena join each other, a new phenomenon is created. This phenomenon is directly reflected in the different media, both printed and electronic ones. Even the media themselves face difficulties in putting these two phenomena in an accurate balance.

A very important aspect of the media and their transformation in Macedonia is also the multicultural discourse. According to Bauer (2006) media's system observation is the same as observing a culture; observing a culture is the

⁵⁸⁴Ronneberger, Franz: Leistungen und Fehlleistungen der Massenkommunikation. In: Langenbucher, Wolfgang (Hrsg.): Politik und Kommunikation. Über die öffentliche Meinungsbildung. München: Piper, 1979. (S. 130).

⁵⁸⁵Bauer, Thomas A.: Medientransition und Kulturwandel. In: The Analyst / June 06

interpretation of phenomena.⁵⁸⁶ When it comes to Macedonia, media's system of observation is very important because it is itself a phenomenon in terms of the views of media companies, and media organizations that create an exchange of thoughts and communications.

The media in general, can be considered as very important transition means since they direct social changes. They can also be seen as cultural means as they change our identity and our world of living and working. In Macedonia, speaking in general terms, the media broadcast (since the beginning of democracy) serial movies (at first cheap serial movies produced in Brazil, Argentina, and Spain, and lately serial movies of Turkish production), news, music spots, reality show such as, Big Brother or similar versions of Big Brother as well as other reality shows, artistic foreign movies, and other formats for entertainment. There is almost no educational program at all. There are only a few educational and political programs where politicians (most of these televisions that broadcast educational programs are close to politics represented by the politicians) are invited to their media, which can be seen much more as an advertising show rather than a critical show. In this regard, if a society chooses a conversation (rather than a discourse) as a television program, then it is either mentally exhausted, without cultural idea, or it is agreed that for the political-symbolic environment to react collectively-apatetic.⁵⁸⁷ Bauer (2006) thinks that if a society manages to consider politics and knowledge in the context of the media as good for the consumer rather than for discourse, then this has to do with the social and cultural characteristics of media use.

Even the news in the Republic of Macedonia is of a one-dimensional character rather than of multidimensional character. The news broadcast positive information on particular party (a kind of advertisement for it); they are not qualitative (there are no facts, no opinions, no resources). In addition, they are not objective and are not seen from a critical point of view. Actually, there is news (basic information models of journalists), but there is no dialogue (basic communication model). This puts forward the very important requirement for a quality journalism, which actually lacks in Macedonia and beyond.

The transition in Macedonia is a very problematic phenomenon because no one knows when it ends, and the media therefore cannot or do not want to play an important role in overcoming this situation. There are many people in Macedonia who are nostalgic about communism, as they have no vision for the future. Thus, they have not recognized (detected) values in terms of freedom and plurality, not only political but also social.

If it comes to tendency in a variety of cultures then it should be said that these varieties are understood differently by politicians, intellectuals, and ethno-nationalism. The media tend to interpret words in different ways, because they transmit articles and thoughts of politicians and intellectuals, or they use these words in connection with the information they create themselves or through political influences. The multicultural society in Macedonia must become an inseparable part of the media.

Media are a very important part of democratic values in a civil society. Their multicultural role and media connectivity with the public should not be underestimated. In theory, we can refer to the concepts of culture as industrialized products of culture, i.e., of cultural goods (Horkheimer and Adorno 1948).⁵⁸⁸ "The cultural industry offers standardized goods to meet multiple requirements, defined as differences that must meet production standards. Through industrial production, a mass culture is created. It is created by a series of elements that openly reveal the cultural industry."⁵⁸⁹ The new division of media and society in Macedonia creates various dilemmas and prejudices. If media's duty is to penetrate into society's life, then Lorimer (1998) says that media in every respect stand in a daily interaction (...) It is the media who teach us how to love, how to smoke (in the style of H. Bogart), how to rob a bank, how to play with different toys, how to dance... the list is limitless. Interaction is not a limiting process. Media is the means that shape the content of a group or individual's life.⁵⁹⁰

MULTICULTURALISM IN THE MEDIA

A very important question of media, but of the multicultural society itself in Macedonia is also the question about the differences. The answer should be on whether there are positive or negative differences (advantages or disadvantage). Media's reporting in Macedonia is a very important element when it comes to differences (especially between Albanians and Macedonians, but also of other ethnicities), respectively how Albanian and Macedonian journalists convey the news to their audience. In the report, journalists play a huge role because they are the main

⁵⁸⁶ Bauer, Thomas A.: Medientransition und Kulturwandel. In: The Analyst / June 06.

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⁵⁸⁸ Horkheimer, Max/Adorno, Theodor W.: Kulturindustrie. Aufklärung als Massenbetrug. Nö: Adorno: Dialektik der Aufklärung. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 1969

⁵⁸⁹ Matelar, Arman i Majkel: Istorijateoriite komunikacija. Skopje, Alef 2003

⁵⁹⁰ Lorimer, Rolend: Masovne komunikacije. Beograd. Clio 1998 (S. 31-32).

actors; design their own methods, configure their roles, create and do the story, and the news and information thus create the so-called media landscape. Therefore, they have a very large responsibility towards the society in general, and towards the different ethnicities in particular. The problem of journalists in Macedonia is that they are trained by unprofessional and incompetent staff. That is why there are no professional journalists in Macedonia. That is why journalism in Macedonia suffers.

The role of media and journalism in general, and of media and journalists in a transition country like Macedonia in particular is to spread their knowledge in the sense of public discourse rather than take the role of a storyteller. This means that the media and the journalists should not work pro-politics and against the wider society, but they should play their role as a "watch dog" in democracy. They should be critical of politics and the state itself, state institutions in general, and should inform the public objectively on these issues.

Although compared to the time of communism, where there was only one radio and one public television, and the reporting was very biased⁵⁹¹, in the time of democracy there is a large number of media outlets, both press and electronic ones, but this does not mean that the situation is improved anyhow. At a recent time, the idea of a variety of media⁵⁹² such as public and private radio and television is very poor, let alone say that it is completely absent. The media seemingly have no interest in reinforcing the notion and multiculturalism itself.⁵⁹³ Through the reinforcement of the multiethnic character in the radio and TV shows, a variety of problems would be solved democratically, simply and in a very flexible way. In this sense, journalists' job could also be facilitated, because they would no longer use hate speech in their reporting. Rather they could focus on other areas specifically in their professional level in order to get the most out of their profession.

Multicultural societies are recognized by interethnic cooperation, tolerance, compromise and interethnic consensus. While the media in Macedonia are used by the ruling political party as a means of control, no concrete steps can be taken in their development in Macedonia. Independence (both contextual and financial), professionalism, social responsibility, freedom of expression, and information are the keys to democratic values and free media.

MEDIA IN DEMOCRACY AND IN MACEDONIA

According to Wright (1974), media's role is spreading and announcing news; interpreting and commenting events, and simultaneously serving for education and fun.⁵⁹⁴ According to the well-known jurist and sociologist Ronnenberger (1987), these duties are also extended to the mass media for social regulation, socialization, recreation and regeneration, public creation, criticism and control, as well as education in society.⁵⁹⁵

In democratic societies it is very important for mass media to create public. Journalists, who work in different media, are a bridge between society and politics. They must know their role in democratic societies and operate like a link between media and society. The media should reflect what is happening in society. They should not report solely politics and political events. Obviously, the media in Macedonia neglects all the other areas; they do not have access to other parts because they are focused only in the political field and political events. In a broader context, there is a lack of criticism and they have no control over the other events, and this lacks completely the aspect of education. The media do not arouse special interests in society.

According to Nerone (1995) and Kleinstauber (1994) media system in Eastern Europe were considered as Marxist, Soviet-Communist, Eastern-Real Socialist, or as totally controlled (the last two descriptions still exist). On the other hand Western media are considered as liberal, socially or democratically controlled.

In Macedonia, the government is the main media player and this is reflected in all areas of social life (politics, culture, economy, society), and the media system can be categorized in the totalitarian category. The government is

⁵⁹¹ The Albanian population has always been considered a second-hand population and was also treated the same way in different media. After the collapse of communism, Albanians in the media were named nationalist, irredentist, separatist, and in 2001 War, they were also called terrorists. The role of the media at the time of democracy did not make any difference to the role of the media in the time of communism. News regarding Turks, Roms, Vlachs and other ethnicities were not reported at all in the Macedonian media.

⁵⁹² In terms of multicultural broadcasts.

⁵⁹³ Journalists are accustomed to working in such a working environment, but new journalists, who are guided in their beginnings by the older ones deal with them and this kind of working climate is shown to them.

⁵⁹⁴ Wright, Charles R..Functional Analysis and Mass Communication – Revisted.In University of Pennsylvania Scholarly Commons – Departmental Papers (ASC). Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania. 1974 (S.199-201).

⁵⁹⁵ Ronneberger, Franz: Funktionen des Systems Massenkommunikation. In Hannes Haas (Hrsg.), Mediensysteme. Struktur und Organisation der Massenmedien in den deutschsprachigen Demokratien (Band 4, S. 154 – 155). Wien: Braumüller. 1987

all the time present in the media and as a consequence it has a significant impact on building up individual and social thought.

In Macedonia, it is often said that the media operating there have a German media model and that the acts and rules of public television are copied from those of the German public television. Also the new media law, which came into force in January 2014, is a summary of the media rules of the European Union states. According to Hadamik (2004) these laws can be taken, adapted, and written if the two criteria are met:

1. Affected states should be related to Western culture and traditions, and
2. Communist culture should be considered a foreign culture.⁵⁹⁶

For Macedonia and its media laws, neither the first nor the second criteria applies. This is because Macedonia cannot be disunited by the communist leadership and has no strong connection with Western culture yet.

According to Offe (1994), a successful transformation process must meet three main criteria:

1. Establish a democratic system (regulation) and a democratic conduct process;
2. Establish the rule of law;
3. Implement economic market structures.⁵⁹⁷

These three approaches can be very important for transformation processes, but should not be counted as universal (comprehensive) for all states that are in transition because of differences and specifics. The fact is that all the states of the former Yugoslavia went almost simultaneously from monism to pluralism. However, some of them (e.g., Slovenia, Croatia) have made progress in many spheres and some have remained in the transition phase even after 27 years (e.g., Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro). If in Slovenia and Croatia the communism was not emphasized that much (for historical reasons) and the democratic society no longer thinks about the communist system and are happy to have it no more, the situation in Macedonia is quite different. Here, people who have had leadership positions in politics at the time of communism are again in leading positions even in the system of democracy. If Slovenia doesn't have problems with the multiethnic state, it can be said that the biggest and most emphasized problem in the Republic of Macedonia is multi-ethnicity. Gatti (1996) makes a distinction in post-communist states' reforms. He categorizes them into three categories:

- **Leaders:** states that have made economic and political reforms.
- **Delayed:** states that are governed by a semi-authoritarian government where barriers to reorganization and reforms prevail. These leaders do not want to do reforms. Interestingly, they do allow a freedom of expression which is very strict and although it seems that exists, in reality it is firmly held under government control. According to Gatti, nearly all former Yugoslav states including Macedonia belong to this group. Macedonia is considered as the leader of this category.
- **Losers:** states that are under the leadership of authoritarian governments which have not done reforms, and use different ways of oppression as power-holding instruments.⁵⁹⁸

In a pluralistic society, mass media have a very important function. They have to convey and link communication between the three state powers (powers, legislatures, and the judiciary). The fourth power, which stands as an informal label for the media cannot do its job in a place like Macedonia, because it only serves to politicians and political powers, and does not serve as a service to the whole society.

In the transition process the media have a very important role. They can be used as means for holding power; as instruments for creating a national public (which for Macedonia as a multiethnic state is a necessity); as means for creating a national⁵⁹⁹ identity; as means for improving intercultural cooperation, and finally as a very important means for political party and government propaganda. By the end of 2008, the government launched a campaign that created propaganda about the separation of the Macedonian people in ancient Macedonians and the great Alexander's grandchildren. This campaign proclaimed that Macedonians are not Slavic people. It should be noted that by disseminating various media content and by spreading or non-spreading (keeping secrets) of news; by using

⁵⁹⁶ Hadamik, Katharina: Medientransformationen und Entwicklungsprozesse in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Ein theoretisch-methodologischer Beitrag zur Analyse postkommunistischer Transformationsverläufe. In *Publizistik – Vierteljahreshefte zur Kommunikationsforschung* (Heft 4). 2004. S. 455 – 456.

⁵⁹⁷ Offe, Claus: *Der Tunnel am Ende des Lichts* (2. Auflage). Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag. 1994 (S. 19-20).

⁵⁹⁸ Gatti, Charles: *The Mirage of Democracy*. In *Open Media Institute* (Hrsg.), *The OMRI Annual Survey of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union – Forging Ahead, Falling Behind* (S. 351 – 352). New York: M. E. Sharpe Inc. 1996.

⁵⁹⁹ This point is very important for Macedonia as in this regard took place the division of the Macedonian people into ancient and Slavic Macedon.

hate speech through the entire media structure, the media in Macedonia have played a destructive role in 27 years of transition. It can be said that the population in particular and the whole society in general have suffered the most from the negative spread of information. Bauer shares the opinion that, "if people, after all this difficult political, social, and mental change, fail to recognize the values for which this change has taken place, then they should not be surprised when they yearn for the past or are lost in the present."⁶⁰⁰

According to Thomaß (2007), the media can be considered as organized systems of social action. In general terms, they build a system called the media system. If we talk about the media, it does not mean that we talk about their technique but also about social organizations that are involved in different ways in the economic, political, social, and cultural realities that also affect the same.⁶⁰¹

According to Schulz (2012), the media system has many functions:

- The media collect and distribute political information to a large audience in unlimited principle;
- The media interpret and evaluate the political scene based on events, issues, and actors, i.e., citizens' demands and policy decisions;
- The media decide on the approach of the political actors to the audience and thus determine their opportunities for action and influence;
- The media often provide the only basis for action both for citizens and for political elite, and at the same time create the condition for emerging of a political audience.⁶⁰²

The lack of qualitative national newspapers creates the tabloidization of newspapers and magazines. The newspapers that appear to be qualitative are related to the government and political parties. They are conservative and based on ethnic divisions.

Bauer (2006) names the media as a structural display in which the cultural changes of social bodies as well as collective movements and changes can be traced directly to their events, identified and diagnosed at almost the same time.⁶⁰³

Under the pluralism, markets are expected to be opened. Above all, under the media pluralism, the strengthening of civil society is expected. Only in this way democratization processes can be supported and strengthened. Transition in Macedonia was also mobilized through some assistance programs. Many countries (from Europe and the United States), the United Nations, and various organizations have invested enough money to help them overcome the transition phase more easily. Only Soros has invested over € 9.5 million since 1992.

Despite the foreign investments in the media sector, in order for Macedonia to have a genuine media system, nothing important has been done yet, and this is the true and scientific meaning for an open society.

CONCLUSION

There are many questions waiting for an answer but three are essential: What, when, and why should we trust the media? Are the events and stories that are shown to us on daily basis completed and are they in our interest? How should we react towards the information that does not have accurate and proven sources? Is there investigative journalism? Could the society trust the media and be oriented to their reporting and as a consequence, gain the ability to make decisions? Unfortunately, it is the opposite in Macedonia. Journalism is more oriented in fidelity than in precision, coherence (logical connection), or historical review. Politics and interest groups decide what will be addressed; who will speak and who will moderate (lead) the show. There are many thinkers and analysts in Macedonia who call it the media's gruesome. Also, this phenomenon is increased by the fact that the media in Macedonia have gone from informing society in Convincing them. The desire to persuade and manipulate society is much more expressed than to inform it fairly. Obviously, it is propaganda. All political influence on the media may seem positive for certain groups because it also brings material benefits to both the government and the ruling parties. However, this link between the media and the politics can have long-lasting consequences for the entire society as well as for the democratic processes. As long as politics and the media work based on principles where

⁶⁰⁰Bauer, Thomas A.: Medientransition und Kulturwandel. In: The Analyst / June 06.

⁶⁰¹Thomaß, Barbara (Hrsg.): Mediensysteme im internationalen Vergleich. 2-te Auflage. UTB. Konstanz 2007.

⁶⁰²Schlulz, Winfried: Politische Kommunikation: Theoretische Ansätze und Ergebnisse empirischer Forschung. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. Wiesbaden 2012 (S. 76).

⁶⁰³Bauer, Thomas A.: Medientransition und Kulturwandel. In: The Analyst / June 06.

one hand washes the other, and the government (politics) is not criticized for misguided policy making⁶⁰⁴ it cannot be talked about critical and independent media in Macedonia.

Macedonia has lost in transition and has failed (with or without purpose) to overcome this stage. Fortunately, there are many new media in Macedonia, but there is always the old dilemma of their functioning.

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⁶⁰⁴ The wrong policy in terms of the general concept (e.g., Project Skopje 2014 should have cost 80 million euros and so far it has gone to a sum of nearly 600 million euros (some foreign experts talk about costs up to 1 Billion € for what the government has been criticized several times in many foreign media (Skopje, Macedonia: Kitsch Capital of the Balkans, Associated Press), but also in the media and government outflow of government spending across the media.