Monitoring report of the
'EU Guidelines for Media Freedom and Media Integrity 2014-2020'
for 2017

Introduction

In 2017, TACSO was responsible for establishing a monitoring system and conducting the monitoring, in coordination with other stakeholders, relevant to the constituting parts of the Results Framework[1] of the 'EU Guidelines for Media Freedom and Media Integrity 2014-2020' **(Media Guidelines)**. The Media Guidelines is a monitoring tool that serves as an important source providing useful information on the European Union's (EU) political and financial support to media development in the region and enabling the governments and media communities in the EU enlargement countries to use the comprehensive data for their own policies and actions. The aim of the monitoring exercise is to have a systematic, comprehensive and efficient assessment of the situation in the EU enlargement countries by applying the same methodology and approach in all the concerned countries.

The following report contains preliminary information about the situation and consequent progress along the indicators of the Results Framework of the Media Guidelines. The Results Framework encompasses elements that look for progress in areas related to**:** Data availability; Legal Environment and Judiciary; Media Governance; Public Service Media; Professional Standards and Ethics; Working Conditions; and Education and Investigative journalism.

More specifically, the report offers a brief overview of common problems found in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, which were elaborated on during the expert panel meetings[2]. In addition, the preliminary report also offers findings from the general population survey conducted in all six countries looking into some of the aspects concerning the Results Framework.

Monitoring Methodology

The methodology for monitoring the Media Guidelines was developed by a team of media experts and professional researchers; whereas some instruments used for the monitoring were developed in consultation with key media experts from the six countries.

The main features of the monitoring system include:

- The need for a unified approach in methodology in all countries of the region.
- Regional comparison and track of national progress.
- The majority of indicators are composite that are broadly defined assessing quality.

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[1] *In addition to the representatives of the EU, elements of the Results Framework have been developed in 2013 throughout regional and national consultations encompassing media experts from the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey.*
* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.
[2] *Six meetings were held in early October 2017: on 2 October in Sarajevo, on 4 October in Podgorica, on 6 October in Belgrade, on 9 October in Skopje, on 11 October in Tirana, and on 13 October in Pristina.*

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- For the majority of the indicators there is no data available from reliable sources of information in the region.
- The need for a synthetized and comparative way of presenting the monitoring findings.
- Sound and reliable research methodology and innovative and participatory approaches.

Information collection

- Information collected for the purpose of monitoring came from the following sources:
  - Expert group country meetings as well as an on-line survey with members of expert panels, assessing full list of indicators,
  - In-depth interviews with representatives of relevant interest groups' organisations/ institutions assessing selected indicators from the full list,
  - On-line survey with Interest groups, also representatives from relevant organisations/ institutions and also assessing selected indicators from the full list,
  - General population survey - sample universe is population of the country 18+, sample size of at least 1,000 respondents per country. Type of sample - stratified random sample, representative for country population. Data collection mode in all countries face-to-face except in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (telephone interviewing). Post-stratification was done by gender, age, education type of settlement and region,
  - Findings from this survey were used for indicators and index formation.

Measuring change

- In order to quantify indicators, in the process of monitoring media freedom and media integrity in the region, index system will be developed. The Results Framework consists of four broad objectives that are divided into 20 results and 58 indicators,
  For the purpose of index formation, indicators were operationalized by items and each of them is in fact an operationalized benchmark from the Media Guidelines. At the end, 247 of items, obtained on various scales (yes/no answers, agreement scales, percentages, averages, numbers), will be analysed.
- After that, all items belonging to one indicator will be summed up in order to obtain one measure per indicator/sub-objective. This score will be categorized in five categories, from the best evaluated to the worst evaluated.

The final country reports encompassing expert group inputs, findings from the general population survey, in-depth interviews and interest groups, including indexes will be completed by the second half of November.

**Brief overview of common problems in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
Montenegro and Serbia, elaborated during the meetings of expert panels**

1. Data availability

In the six polled countries covered by the monitoring, the data on media sector performance and dynamics are either inadequate or non-existent. There are differences between countries, but most countries have no reliable data on the number of media, the number of journalists and other media employees, the data on their economic and professional performances, the data on instigated court cases against journalists and media etc. Two reasons are dominant: one is underdeveloped statistical and data collection system and the other is resistance of different institutions either to collect or to disseminate data. In most countries, data on media performance are acquired on basis of individual research. However, this research is ad hoc and practically completely dependent on donations from the EU or other international organizations. Data availability could be improved considerably in the whole area through pressures on authorities to improve transparency of data at their disposal and through demands to media industry to improve their efforts in acquiring and releasing verified data and market performance indicators. A regional initiative that would provide an assessment of the situation with the data collection about the media and propose efficient measures for improvement in all six countries could be a turning point in this area.

2. Legal Environment & Judiciary

In all six countries, the Constitution and media laws incorporate provisions in accordance with the Article 10 of ECHR. In all of them, implementation of the law shows that formally adequate legal framework is not enough to ensure freedom of expression as stipulated in Article 10. The main reason for such a situation in all six countries is the same: political and economic power centres are seizing control over the media, ignoring the public interest and preventing media freedoms. Such a situation is connected with problems with law enforcement and lack of rule of law. Confronted with such realities, media and professional associations are struggling with authorities for more freedom of expression. In several countries, some modest positive steps have been taken by the authorities. Public pressure and appeals raised by journalists and media will most probably remain the only persistent effort for improving law enforcement in the upcoming period.

3. Media Governance

In most countries of the region, regulatory and self-regulatory bodies in the media sector exist and are operational. The differences in performances between countries are significant, but in all of them authorities try to establish control mainly through the system of election of board members in the regulatory bodies. The independence and overall performance of regulators and self-regulators is particularly important for media freedom and media integrity, since their activity or passivity affect media conduct, but also trust of citizens in the media. The pressure on authorities to respect independence of regulators is seen as an important step for improving the critical situation in this field. On the other hand, commitment of the media to submit to transparency requirements and self-regulatory mechanisms beyond political divisions should be achieved.

4. Public Service Media

Public service media are under a different degree of influence or control by the authorities in the six countries. The budget financing of PSM is seen as the main lever of such development. Certain improvement of independence, and

lessening of pressure by the authorities is seen in PSM in Montenegro and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, while in Bosnia in Herzegovina, all three public service broadcasters are in dire straits with even so pessimistic options that they may cease to exist. Public service media are facing two important challenges: a) being financed from the state budget, their right to compete on advertising market is questioned, and b) they are losing their role in fostering public interest not only in news programs, but also in cultural, social, art and other public interest content, which is poorly provided by the commercial media.

5. Professional Standards and Ethics

Professional standards and media ethics are declining with extensive spreading of tabloid journalism and inefficiently regulated hate speech and disinformation on internet portals and in social media. In all six countries, journalists' associations or informal groups of journalists are promoting Code of Ethics, but they do not have efficient remedies to enforce changes for the better. This is the area where more efficient measures against hate speech and other type of unethical media behaviour need to be introduced.

6. Working Conditions & Education

In most countries, journalists' and other media employees' working conditions are very poor. Journalists have low salaries which are usually below the country average. Journalists and other media workers do not have almost any protection of their labour rights, there are no collective contracts, unions are weak or not allowed, all of that pushing the journalists and their families on the edge of existence. The consequences are seen in the reduced professionalism and increased self-censorship. The main problems with journalists' education are practically the same in all six countries: universities produce young journalists without practical knowledge while informal education through in-house or external training courses is less available than in previous years. Few media, mainly public service broadcasters, have in-housetraining capacities. In most countries, the training programs for journalists are provided by CSOs such as media centres and investigative journalism centres. The reasons for diminishing of the informal education for journalists and media are seen in the reduced donor support to this area, and also in fading interest of media in education of their staff. The cuts in staff in the media influence their readiness to allow absence of staff members for participation in the training courses.

7. Investigative journalism

Investigative journalism is a bright side of media sectors in all six countries. Development trends and modus-operandi are similar everywhere. Investigative journalism is most often practiced in specialized CSOs or similar independent entities that produce investigative stories, which are then published on their online platforms or in mainstream media. Only few traditional media still practice investigative journalism inside their newsrooms and some media even have specialized investigative divisions/sections. The main challenges of investigative journalism are: their results are not published in the mainstream media, especially those under the control of authorities or business centers (this problem is partly overcome through Internet dissemination of investigative stories); these journalists are often physically attacked in the whole region and there is a problem of sustainability of investigative journalism. Confronted with foreign donations shrinking and the general lack of financial resources for investigative journalism, investigative entities are forced to reluctantly enter into bidding for other projects in order to survive. By engaging in non-investigative projects, they are abandoning their core role of defending public interests through investigative journalism.

Summary of the General Population survey in the region on current state of media

News consumption: Regionally, about three fifths of citizens follow the news on a daily basis. This percentage rises to three quarters among citizens of Albania. On the other hand, on average about six percent of citizens doesn't follow news at all.

Trust in media in general: On average, every second citizen trust media in their country. Albania, Kosovo and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia stand out as the countries with the highest trust in media, while BIH and Serbia are the countries with the lowest trust.

Access to information through the media: Half of citizens in the region state that information about relevant issues are not accessible or are accessible to a small degree through the media in their country. The only country where a slightly better situation is registered is Albania.

Freedom of media to report critically and express their view: On average, slightly more than a third of citizens in the region believes that journalists and media outlets in their country are free to express their views and report critically about relevant news. Somewhat better situation is registered in Albania and Serbia, while the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia stands out as the most problematic country when it comes to freedom of expression through the media.

Current state of media freedom - pressure on journalists and media reporting: Three out the ten people in the region believe that there is a high pressure on journalist/media reporting in their country. Additionally, every second citizen believes that pressure is present to some degree. Again, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia stands out as the most problematic country when it comes to the current state of media freedom.

Self-censorship: More than a quarter of citizens in the region believes that statements by public officials which might possibly influence journalists and/or media not to publish their information are often in their country.

Importance of freedom of speech and media freedom: On average, four out the five people in the region agrees that freedom of media is a precondition for a free democratic society as well as that freedom of speech as a fundamental human right should be strictly protected. On the other hand, one out of four people agrees that the government should be allowed to restrict media freedom (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is somewhat of an exception with more than two fifths of the citizens agreeing with this statement).

Familiarity with investigative journalism: Six out of ten citizens in the region noted that media in their country do engage in investigative reporting, at least to some extent. But less than one fifth believes that media in their country engage in investigative reporting to a sufficient extent. Albania and especially the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia stand out as countries with the much higher percentage of citizens stating that media are engaged in investigative reporting to a sufficient extent. Additionally, according to citizens only a few media outlets are engaged in investigative reporting.

Awareness of journalists' professional associations: Countries vary greatly when it comes to their awareness of journalists' professional associations, but they mostly agree that the work of journalists' professional associations contribute to better situation of media and journalists in their country. This is especially the case in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, while citizens in Albania seem to be less familiar their work.