

**COUNTRY REPORT, REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA  
45<sup>th</sup> EPRA Meeting, Edinburgh, 18 - 19 May 2017**

**Electoral monitoring**

Based on the amendments to the Electoral Code adopted in July 2016, as a result of the agreement reached among the four largest political parties in the government and the parliamentary opposition, the Agency received an obligation, in the case of the Early Parliamentary Elections scheduled on 11 December 2016 only, to start the monitoring of media coverage of the elections 100 days before the Election Day, to amend the Monitoring Methodology (within 30 days from the date the amendments to the Code were adopted) and to act upon the proposals of the Ad Hoc Committee,<sup>1</sup> which was formed within the frameworks of the Agency.

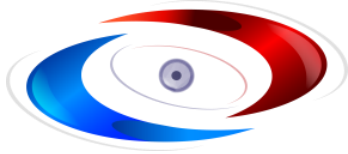
For the first time since the formation of the regulatory body, instead of the Agency's professional service, the assessments concerning balanced reporting were being made by a political body – the Ad Hoc Committee – which was also deciding about the measures to be taken against the broadcasters, instead of this being done by the regulatory body. Therefore, in order to ensure conditions for smooth functioning of the Agency's Professional Service, which prepared the monitoring reports concerning the broadcasters and the reports of the Ad Hoc Committee on one hand, and to provide maximum efficiency in the process of monitoring media coverage of the elections, on the other, the Agency Director adopted an Action Procedure on 7 September 2016. The Procedure defined the contents of the monitoring reports and of the Ad Hoc Committee's action proposals, as well as the deadlines for their submission to the Agency Director.

In accordance with the electoral regulations and the political agreement, the Agency started the monitoring of the Early Parliamentary Elections scheduled on 11 December 2016, on 2 September. Until the start of the election campaign, subjected to monitoring were most of the broadcasters airing programme at the state level, i.e. 18 programming services. With the start of the election campaign, the monitoring was extended to a total of 111 programming services.

In accordance with the Action Procedure adopted by the Director, the Agency's Professional Service prepared two groups of reports. For each 10-day period, starting from 2 September 2016, reports were being prepared for each media outlet in particular, including a detailed description of the manner of the latter's reporting in the central daily information programme, and an overview of all aired special information programmes and other programmes involving contents or entities relevant to the evaluation of the outlet's coverage of the electoral process that was to be made by the Ad Hoc Committee for

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<sup>1</sup> The Ad Hoc Committee was composed of five members, of whom four members were appointed by the two political parties in the opposition with the largest number of MPs and the two political parties in the government that had the largest number of MPs in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, while the fifth member was elected on the consensual proposal of the four members of the Ad Hoc Committee.



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**AGENCY FOR AUDIO AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA SERVICES**

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Observing Media Coverage. The second group of reports was about detected violations of the Electoral Code, and they were prepared immediately after a violation had been detected.

Special reports were prepared about the free political presentation aired by the Programming Service intended for airing the activities of the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia (the Parliament Channel), and by the services of the Public Enterprise of *Makedonska Radio-Televizija Skopje* (the Macedonian Radio and Television – Skopje), as was an overview of the paid political advertising aired during the election campaign.

During its mandate, the Ad Hoc Committee submitted 192 (a hundred and ninety-two) proposals to the Director of the Agency not to impose measures, and 67 (sixty-seven) proposals to impose measures, i.e. initiate misdemeanour procedures with the competent courts in the Republic of Macedonia. Twice in writing and a number of times through statements given to the media or on the social networks, members of the Ad Hoc Committee tried to exert pressure on the Agency's Professional Service about the way it conducted the monitoring. On several occasions, the Ad Hoc Committee augmented its proposals by alleged violations, ungroundedly and contrary to the reports of the Professional Service<sup>2</sup>.

Acting upon the submitted proposals to impose measures, the Agency initiated:

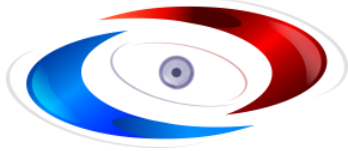
- 46 (forty-six) misdemeanour procedures, requesting to pronounce warnings against 24 (twenty-four) broadcasters for first-time violations of the Electoral Code provisions; and
- 24 (twenty-four) settlement procedures i.e. misdemeanour procedures, requesting to impose fines, against 9 (nine) broadcasters due to repeated violations of the Electoral Code.

The most frequent infringements against the Electoral Code during the reporting period, for which measures were imposed, were non-compliance with the rules for broadcasting paid political advertising (PPA) and failure to ensure fair, balanced and unbiased coverage of the electoral process, i.e. not ensuring level playing field for all participants in the election campaign within the broadcasters' programmes.

Throughout the entire monitoring period (September-December) the Agency also reacted several times against instances of noncompliance with the professional standards of reporting.

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<sup>2</sup> The Ad Hoc Committee submitted a letter to the Professional Service alleging violations against the Electoral Code that had gone unregistered. The Agency's response, including a detailed explanation of why the indicated news items had not been registered as violations is available on the Agency's website: [http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2997%3A-75-&catid=103%3Astart-info-srd-srd&lang=mk](http://www.avmu.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2997%3A-75-&catid=103%3Astart-info-srd-srd&lang=mk)



### **Ownership structure**

In the reporting period the Agency adopted two Decisions allowing changes in the broadcasters' ownership structure. Also, the Agency adopted a Decision on investigating illicit media concentration. These data is published in the Agency's semi-annual report on supervising the broadcasters' ownership structure, the illicit media concentration and the broadcasters' obligation to ensure transparency of their ownership structure and financing sources. The report was prepared in January 2017, covering the second half of 2016.

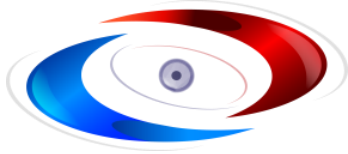
### **Media Literacy**

At the end of 2016, results were published from the research into media literacy among the adult population in the Republic of Macedonia (16 years of age and older), as the first research of this kind in Macedonia, the results of which will constitute the basis for building policies and planning projects for promoting media literacy in Macedonia, and the benchmark for measuring their successfulness. The methodology and the instrument were prepared by an IPA expert, in consultation with the Secretary General of the European Association for Viewers' Interests (EAVI), within the frameworks of the IPA project titled "Enhancing the Administrative Capacities of Telecom and Media Authorities for Efficient Regulation of the New Digital and Multiple Play Services".

The research produced comprehensive answers to a number of questions regarding media accessibility, the critical reading and adult citizens' preparedness for active participation in the democratic processes in the RM. The detailed results can be found on the AAVMS' website (at the moment, they are being translated into English). As more interesting, we can single out several of these, which show that the citizens read the media critically, but are not prepared to take active part in the social processes. For instance, 62.71 % of the respondents consider that different TV channels often report differently about the same events; 74.66 % most often do not accept the information from one source only but consult several media outlets, while 69.01 % do not share their awareness of the great and substantial differences in the reporting about the same events with any civil association or public institution. Further on, nearly 100% of the respondents own a TV set; 77.08% possess a PC or laptop; 20.83% own a tablet; 78.86% have Internet access at home; 93.3% have a mobile phone, of which 70.32% are smartphones, etc.

The Agency made efforts to adapt, for the Macedonian audience, one more video spot of the international organization EAVI's cycle of sports dedicated to media literacy. The spot was presented at the Agency's Public Meeting on 29 December 2016. The Agency requested all television stations to air the spot in their programmes. Currently, adaptation of a third EAVI spot is under way.

The Agency actively cooperates with and takes an active part in the work of various international and domestic conferences on media literacy, organized by citizen organizations, the OSCE and the European Commission's Expert Group on Media Literacy. Currently, the Agency is in process of



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establishing a media literacy network composed of the relevant stakeholders – public institutions and ministries, privately-owned and public broadcasters, citizen organizations and educational bodies.

**Media Accessibility for Persons with Sensory Impairments**

As part of the activities envisaged by the three-year *Programme for Ensuring Media Accessibility for Persons with Sensory Impairments*, adopted in 2015, in December 2016, the Agency completed the research titled “Television and Persons with Sensory Impairments – Offer and Needs”. The research was conducted in two stages. The first stage explored the quantity and quality of the offer of television programmes intended for persons with sensory impairments (hearing and vision losses), by way of analyzing responses to the Questionnaire that had been sent to all TV services on 11 August 2016. The second stage was realized through interviews with representatives of the organizations representing the vision and hearing impaired, and other relevant organizations, concerning the media-related needs of persons with sensory impairments and their positions regarding the programmes intended for them. The results were presented at the latest public meeting of the Agency, on 29 December 2016.

The communication with these organizations meant realization of the activity planned to be conducted during this year: establishing cooperation with all relevant organizations of the persons with vision and hearing impairments.

**Gender and Media**

In December, the Agency's website were the published researches into gender issues, which had been conducted on a sample of newscasts and advertisements aired by the television programming services at the state level in April and May 2016. The research results were sent to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and were also presented at the latest public meeting of the Agency, on 29 December 2016.

**Activities for persons with sensory impairments**

Currently under way is an adaptation of the Agency's website to make it available for use by the persons with sensory impairments. In this way, persons who have total or partial vision impairments will be able to listen to the contents on the Agency's website, smoothly and uninterruptedly, in three languages – the standard oral Macedonian, Albanian and English languages.