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# BULGARIA

In the past year, Bulgarian media have been at the center of political change marked by citizen protests, the resignation of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, early elections, and the formation of a tenuous coalition government. Moreover, government officials, for example the speaker of parliament and members of the judiciary, have allegedly continued to exercise pressure and harass independent journalists and media outlets critical of the government.

During this period social media tools have played an important role and increasingly citizens are taking greater initiative to seek alternative sources of information and news, particularly turning to online media platforms. However, many traditional and online media outlets abandoned their functions as providers of objective news and played an active role in the political battles of 2013, taking sides and actively promoting political parties and candidates yet nonetheless claiming publicly to be neutral.

The country has witnessed the largest period of protests since the fall of communism nearly 24 years ago. In June 2013, thousands marched on the capital over the appointment of Delyan Peevski, a media mogul, who was appointed as head of the State Agency for National Security. Despite his resignation soon after being appointed, protests have continued into early 2014 amid growing dissatisfaction over corruption, monopolistic practices, and lack of viable economic reform.

Additionally, the non-transparent media ownership and the huge concentration of media outlets within a few conglomerates remain the weakest feature of Bulgarian media, and the problem has continued to become more acute. Concentration of ownership has also spread into the online media sphere, as seen with the multitude of print, broadcast, and online publications affiliated with a single corporate structure who promote the government agenda in exchange for legislative and financial support from the state.

Professional standards and trust in the media as a whole continue to worsen; interestingly, the efficacy of propaganda has also weakened despite the efforts of the multi-platform pro-government media conglomerate, which has failed to sustain a positive image of the government or even of its own bosses, who are among the least popular public figures in the country.

# BULGARIA at a glance

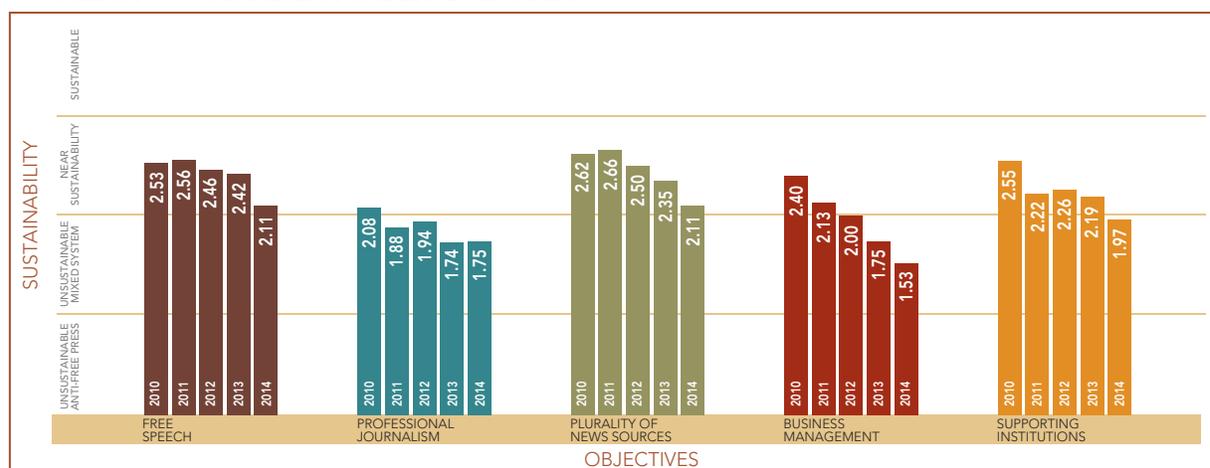
## GENERAL

- > Population: 6,924,716 (July 2014 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Sofia
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Bulgarian 76.9%, Turkish 8%, Roma 4.4%, Other 0.7%, Unknown 10% (2000 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religions (% of population): Eastern Orthodox 59.4%, Muslim 7.8%, Other 1.7%, None, 2.7%, Unspecified 27.4% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > Languages: Bulgarian, Turkish, Roma
- > GNI (2012-Atlas): \$50.00 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > GNI per capita (2012-PPP): \$15,450 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > Literacy rate: 98.4%; male 98.7%, female 98% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President or top authority: President Rosen Plevneliev (since January 22, 2012)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations: Print: 354 newspapers; Radio Stations: 87; Television Stations: 114 (National Statistics Institute 2012)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: Total daily circulation: 374,660 (National Statistics Institute 2012)
- > Broadcast ratings: Top three television stations: bTV, NOVA, BNT1
- > News agencies: Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (state), BGNES (private), Focus Information Agency (private)
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: \$758 million (Be Media Consultant advertising monitoring agency)
- > Internet Usage: 3.395 million users (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: BULGARIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2014: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2013

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (.10)

**Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):** Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

**Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):** Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

**Near Sustainability (2-3):** Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

**Sustainable (3-4):** Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

Scores for all years may be found online at [http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE\\_msiscorers.xls](http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls)

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Bulgaria Objective Score: 2.11

The general conclusion of the panelists was that the legal and social protections of free speech exist but are not being vigorously and equally enforced. Stoyana Georgieva, editor-in-chief at Mediapool.bg, stated, “The legal norms effectively guarantee neither the freedom of speech nor access to information—the laws are bypassed or are selectively implemented; the regulators do not fulfill their functions. Despite attempts [by authorities] to exercise pressure on investigative journalists and media, these do not disclose their sources.” The panelists also noted the decision of the Bulgarian Constitutional Court to remove from the Radio and Television Law language that prevents officers from the former secret police of the Communist regime from participating in regulatory bodies for public broadcasting. The move by the Constitutional Court was seen as an attempt to limit the independence of the public media. “There is a complete reversal of values in the media; the regulatory bodies have abdicated their function of promoting these values,” according to independent producer and media lecturer Konstantin Markov.

According to panelists, the process to switch to digital broadcasting has uncovered a lack of competition and pluralism. The European Commission has referred Bulgaria

According to panelists, the process to switch to digital broadcasting has uncovered a lack of competition and pluralism. The European Commission has referred Bulgaria to the EU’s Court of Justice over the assignment of digital broadcast spectrum because of antitrust concerns.

to the EU’s Court of Justice over the assignment of digital broadcast spectrum because of antitrust concerns. Essentially, the Commission has found that the procedures in Bulgaria lead to the “exclusion of potential candidates” through “restrictive award conditions.” As a result of the procedures, two of the companies holding six out of the seven digital broadcast networks directly belong to a pro-governmental media conglomerate. Nelly Ognyanova, a European media law professor at Sofia University, added, “The licensing regime does not help strengthen the market and increase diversity.”

Panelists claim that there have been attempts to use investigations into taxes as an opportunity to hinder independent media. For example, multiple tax investigations were launched against Economedia, the publishers of *Capital*, one of the few remaining print publications outside the “pro-governmental” camp of the New Bulgarian Media Group.

Panelists noted that there have been relatively fewer crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets in 2013. However the panelists observed an increase in the number of threats against journalists. For example, investigative reporter Hristo Hristov received threats against his life and family for publishing results of his research into the archives of the former State Security Services and the investigations related to the Communist past of Bulgaria. Often, threats come from representatives of authorities, according to panelist and Mediapool reporter Boris Mitov, who was investigated by the prosecutor’s office for allegedly disclosing state secrets related to the prosecutors’ use of surveillance data. The reporter was interrogated twice before the prosecutors “realized” that the information quoted in his publications was actually not secret. Moreover, other cases have seen threats issued by political figures such as Volen Siderov, leader of the pro-governmental, xenophobic party Ataka, who has physically attacked reporters in parliament while demanding that Bulgarian

## LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state of public media.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets’ access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

Kanevchev added, "There is a growing critical mass of discontent within the journalism community, which may rekindle the will to enforce some measure of self-regulation."

National Television (BNT) provide his party with increased positive coverage.

As far as the legal protections of the editorial independence of state or public media are concerned, the panelists noted again that while norms exist on paper, there have been attempts to interfere with the editorial policy of BNT and Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) for example. One such attempt was the appeal by the speaker of parliament to BNT to limit its coverage of the anti-government protests; another was the budget cut for BNT seen by many as a sanction for its objective coverage of the protests.

Libel in Bulgaria is an issue of criminal law, however cases against journalists in 2013 were rare. Further, as a general rule, public officials are held to higher standards. According to the panelists, the courts do not treat all defendants equally and tend to favor individuals with access to power. In a controversial case, the mayor of Haskovo successfully sued a TV 7 anchor for libel; the TV 7 anchor has since left the station and is running for parliament. A few similar cases of mayors suing local reporters await trial in other regional courts. Conversely, there are cases of media professionals who have sued politicians. For example, the hosts of an entertainment program aired by one of the national television stations, Nova TV, have announced they will file slander lawsuits against Ataka party leader Volen Siderov, who hosts a political talk show on TV Alfa, for offensive remarks made in public. Incidentally, Sidenrov has also successfully sued a popular television personality for offensive remarks.

According to Stoyana Georgiev, since the election of the new government, there is a visible deterioration in access to information. The press offices of ministries, the government, and the judiciary decline requests to provide even routine information and insist that every request should be officially filed under the access to information legislation. Often, this results in a two week delay to get even a simple question answered, and Georgieva added, "Obviously the goal is to stop journalists from asking questions."

Access to international news sources remains one of Bulgaria's strongest indicators of media sustainability, with a number

of sources available online. Citizens and media professionals alike also benefit from fast and cheap internet connections.

Aspiring journalists may enter the job market freely, although low wages and the pressure applied to journalists from various interests groups pose barriers for some interested in the field.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Bulgaria Objective Score: 1.75

Since 2013 and through early 2014, growing political tensions in Bulgaria have hastened a "completely polarized" media market according to the panelists. Two political and ideological camps have formed, one supporting the government and the other in support of the opposition. This situation has contributed to poor professional standards and an absence of objective and unbiased reporting of the facts by the media. *Trud's* editor-in-chief, Ivan Michalev, stated "Many media outlets openly claim allegiance to either the government or opposition, producing visibly biased content with facts mixed with spin."

Bulgaria has a Code of Professional Ethics and two ethical commissions—one for print and one for broadcast media—but the implementation of the standards are neither universally nor vigorously enforced. Despite the massive violations of the Code, the broadcast commission did not review a single case in 2013, while the print commission reviewed just two cases connected to a package of complaints by the deputy speaker of parliament against

### JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

#### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well-sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

a local newspaper and a case brought forth by an editor-in-chief regarding copyright violations. According to Ivan Kanevchev, member of the board of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists, there is a “crisis in the system of self-regulation, but there’s also the potential for a new beginning.” Kanevchev added, “There is a growing critical mass of discontent within the journalism community, which may rekindle the will to enforce some measure of self-regulation.” The breakdown in professional standards is the direct result of media owners using the media for favors to the government and to pressure or provide negative publicity of their competitors. Nicoletta Daskalova, a media expert, researcher, and lecturer with the Media Democracy Foundation asserted, “Partisanship has replaced neutrality,” and added, “Reporters and editors lack stable values and ideology—the speed with which they reversed their opinion after the elections is shocking.” The majority of media outlets within the pro-government New Bulgarian Media Group have formed their own “Bulgarian Media Union,” adhering to a separate code of ethics that has yet to be implemented.

Panelists cited plagiarism as a growing problem. According to Ivan Radev of the Association of European Journalists, “Massive unlicensed copying of content is dealing the final death blow to traditional media.”

A separate and very serious problem is the rise of hate speech. According to Ognyanova, hate speech—rather an exception in previous years—is becoming the standard form of expression not just for the xenophobic Ataka members of parliament, but also increasingly for protesters; its use in the media becomes inevitable as it is becoming a part of the language of the street. Moreover, there is an “institutionalization” of online hate speech where paid “trolls” populate forums and social media of all media outlets with hate speech, including racist and xenophobic comments, and targeting political opponents.

Self-censorship remains the most important constraint on development within this objective; Radev noted that “self-censorship is rather the rule than the exception.”

Coverage of key events also worsened considerably. Daskalova stated that there are many issues that are “taboo” for the media, for example coverage of “the negative effect on the environment” to avoid upsetting investors. According to panel discussion moderator Petko Georgiev, “There is a serious problem with any coverage related to the activities of current or potential advertisers,” and Nelly Ognyanova and Ivan Radev added that, ultimately, “there is no visible distinction between editorial and advertorial content.”

The pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are also problematic—they do not discourage corruption

and cannot help retain qualified personnel within the media profession in Bulgaria. Emerging media organizations offer unrealistic remuneration packages in order to attract established journalists from other media outlets, but soon they start decreasing the promised salaries. Petko Georgiev asserted, “Media loyalty is considered by some media managers to be a problem.”

Although the past year has witnessed significant political discord and change, entertainment programming continues to eclipse news and information programs, according to the panelists. Panelists added that entertainment should not be underestimated—some of the most critical and hard-hitting revelations about the political process have been made through fiction and entertainment programs like *The Lords of the Air*, produced by BNT, which addresses problems such as organized crime and its links to the political and media establishment.

Quality niche reporting and programming exist, but these are limited to a few media outlets in Bulgaria. According to the panelists, there is an increase in good investigative journalism on BNT by Rossen Tzvetkov and others journalists at bTV and Nova, as well as reporters working online who examine sensitive topics such as election fraud, child trafficking, and youth violence. However, many of the panelists cited concerns over false or staged investigations. For example, a TV 7 reporter investigating a “cocaine track” between Bulgaria and Serbia was reportedly paying “witnesses” who were former Bulgarian media employees.

Traditionally the highest indicator score in this objective is awarded to the quality of the facilities and equipment available for gathering, producing, and distributing news. Due to developments in technology, the falling prices of equipment, and the availability of fast yet affordable Internet in Bulgaria, the efficacy of gathering news has increased even during hard economic times.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Bulgaria Objective Score: 2.11

Plurality of public and private news sources exists in Bulgaria, with a particular increase in online sources. The increased popularity of online media has resulted in a boom of information, but also of disinformation on the Internet. For example, “trolls,” or paid contributors on forums and social media continue to write in favor of a political party or an oligarch, according to Ivan Michalev.

However, the variety of sources does not equal varying viewpoints. Ognyanova emphasized that “plurality does

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not equal diversity.” Stoyana Georgieva added, “Multiple news sites, blogs, and newspapers are often distributed by the same publishing group who appear to be offering an assortment of opinions,” however this is fundamentally “misleading.” Many of the panelists agreed that the plurality of news sources is artificially created and results in increased media noise.

One of the most positive features of the media landscape of Bulgaria in 2013 was the willingness of state and public media outlets to capture the views of the whole political spectrum. However, these efforts have at times have been castigated by the government, as seen with BNT who were punished with budget cuts for objective coverage of the protests. Petko Georgiev suggested that “2014 will be a test for public media” as to whether or not these outlets are susceptible to political pressure.

A specific phenomenon in the news coverage for 2013 has been described by the panelists as “artificial balancing” of the news. The reports on the massive anti-government protests were immediately followed by reports of staged

#### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

##### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

pro-government rallies called “counter-protests.” The panelists believe the “counter protests” are a part of a media strategy designed to manipulate the audience and create the false illusion of a divided society.

The independent news agencies that are expected to gather and distribute news for media outlets are currently in crisis. The state news agency BTA is surviving the financial crisis, but its services are not affordable for many of the independent media outlets. Among the other news agencies, the panelists noted the small online agency BGNES reversed its positions drastically and began supporting the new ruling majority, which resulted in the resignation of its editors-in-chief.

According to the panelists, the ability of private media to produce their own news is not limited by any regulations; however, many private outlets are producing less of their own content due to financial limitations. Ognyanova specified that radio stations in particular do not produce any of their own news content. Many of the participants remarked on the significant difficulties faced also by regional media outlets that operate on limited budgets and are highly dependent on local sources for funding, which affects their production output.

Over the years, transparency of media ownership and the concentration into conglomerates has been a core weakness of the Bulgarian media landscape. The trend towards further concentration continued in 2013 and has led to the creation of the megalithic New Bulgarian Media Group, which owns and controls most of the printed press, a growing number of broadcast media outlets, and a vast network of online media publications. The group was swift in changing its allegiance to the new government, and is strictly following the business model of trading influence for legislative and financial support from the government. According to Petko Georgiev, “There are more pro-governmental newspapers in Bulgaria than in Belarus—only [in Bulgaria] most are disguised as independent.” The panelists therefore see no hope for change and, according to Ognyanova, the regulating agencies do not address these monopolistic practices.

Investment funds and offshore companies, listed as owners, do not disclose information on the actual ownership structure and therefore the parties deciding the editorial policies of these media conglomerates remain a matter of speculation. For example, panelists cited the Time Warner takeover of bTV, Bulgaria’s largest private television channel, which was approved by the European Commission. However the transparency of the merger did not dampen speculation over the editorial control of the Bulgarian entity. Several journalists known for their critical stance of the government have since left bTV, reinforcing

the panelists' concerns over bTV's neutrality. Moreover, politicians from the ruling majority, alongside media outlets from the New Bulgarian Media Group, have been attacking EconoMedia, the publishers of one of the few remaining independent weeklies, *Capital*, for having formed their own conglomerate, which is allegedly connected to the president and funded by Western foundations. In a move seen by many of the panelists as protectionist, the son of the president of New Bulgarian Media Group, an MP from the ruling coalition whose failed appointment as the head of the country's national security services sparked massive anti-government protests, recently introduced a bill in parliament restricting offshore ownership of media. Since the New Bulgarian Media Group is controlled without financing from offshore companies, this potential legislation is expected to render little if any change in the current media environment.

As in previous years, there is a discernable absence of minority language sources and social interest pieces. Illiteracy among ethnic minorities is a contributing factor, however Daskalova remarked, "The prevailing approach towards the minorities is to stigmatize rather than to protect their rights."

While the media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues, there are problems with the diversity and depth of the coverage, the panelists noted. In general, there is very little international news, however this, they said, is related to a lack of interest from the audience and not due external limitations. Moreover, national media outlets rarely cover events outside the capital. Local media outlets, according to Ivan Kanevchev, are dwindling, as most local news is now available online.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Bulgaria Objective Score: 1.53

For the first time in 13 years, panelists awarded the lowest scores for the management practices of media outlets in Bulgaria. Most of the participants attributed this regress to changes in the media market and a failing business model centered on "trading influence" utilized by the government and advertisers. As the government continues to increase the role they play within the media market, the majority of outlets cannot operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises, the panelists asserted.

Panelists added that the editorial independence of the media continued to deteriorate in 2013, partially due to the crippling financial crisis and the absence of a viable

Radio stations throughout Bulgaria do not have the resources to invest in the creation of news programs and, according to Assen Grigorov and Ivan Michalev, "Radio is dead as an effective source of information," due in part to the growth of the Internet.

business model. Editorial independence without financial independence is not possible; media businesses are forced to seek alternative means for reaching their target audiences and, according to the panelists, have grown dependent on advertisers, government funds, and on trading influence.

Radio stations throughout Bulgaria do not have the resources to invest in the creation of news programs and, according to Assen Grigorov and Ivan Michalev, "Radio is dead as an effective source of information," due in part to the growth of the Internet.

The government has become the largest advertiser in Bulgaria through the procurement of information campaigns using European Union funds. The funds are distributed without open tenders or a clear understanding of the criterion. "Paradoxically, this is being done at the expense of the European taxpayer, with the funds donated by the European Union to show Bulgarian solidarity with Europe," according to Petko Georgiev. Moreover, corporate advertisers are leveraging their influence to force outlets to project a positive image or else threats are made to

#### MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

##### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

**“The media do not invest in training their staff (with the exception of TV7) as editors request their reporters to cover multiple beats and write numerous stories, which inevitably results in low quality pieces, especially in regional media,” according to Daskalova.**

withdraw advertising. Ivan Kanevchev asserted, “As the economy stagnates, the role of the government and advertisers within the media market has increased.”

The panelists also discussed the relationship between the banks and conglomerates, as seen by a disproportionate share of state funds deposited in Corporate and Commercial Bank, which allegedly controls the New Bulgarian Media Group conglomerate. While the bank’s management denies any involvement with the media, investigative reports have uncovered a clear connection. Many analysts see a link between significant government funds, exposure of the bank, and the pro-governmental stance—regardless of the party in power—of the media outlets in the conglomerate. This exposure also may explain why the media conglomerate changed its allegiance in favor of the new government and abandoned past ties.

Two highly respected Bulgarian freelance contributors to the Germany’s Deutsche Welle (DW) were suspended after an official letter from Corporate and Commercial Bank vaguely threatened DW with legal action, only to be reinstated after the audience and protestors organized a social media campaign. In a letter to DW, leaked by the press, the bank denied any leverage over the media and ownership and accused the two journalists of not being objective.

Another visible aspect of state intervention in the media market is its distribution of state subsidies to the public media, BNR and BNT, and its funneling of budget funds to selected media for “information campaigns.” BNT’s budget subsidy for 2014 has been reduced in an apparent attempt to punish the public broadcaster for its independent editorial policy. Dimitar Radev cited the information campaign around digitalization as an example of “how limited national resources are distributed toward private players in order to increase control over broadcast media.” Interestingly, the campaign, which included information on the importance of using set-top boxes on older television units once analog broadcasting ends, did not include a budget for BNT’s participation, whose target audience requires these upgrades.

It is also hard to account for the actual level of advertising revenue generated by media companies, as the market is not transparent with the exception of a few of the biggest foreign-owned media organizations. “While there is significant growth in online advertising, it is still not enough to support independent online news sites,” according to Ognyanova.

The panelists noted differences between how market research data is used by various media companies. For example, large foreign owned media companies along with BNT utilize market research to develop their strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to meet the needs and interests of their audience. Conversely, many traditional and online media outlets do not use market research data to tailor their programming and/or advertising plans.

In Bulgaria, reliable print circulation figures do not exist. Ivan Kanevchev noted, “Up to 50 percent of the printed papers are returned for recycling” and are only printed to meet the inflated expectations of publishers. As for broadcast audience measurement, Dimitar Radev noted, “The distorted media measurement systems for broadcast media help redirect financial resources to select market players.”

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Bulgaria Objective Score: 1.97

There has been a significant decrease in the role supporting institutions play in furthering professional interests of independent media in Bulgaria. Strong trade associations once represented the interest of media managers and owners, providing high-quality member services. However, professional associations have since weakened, and lack of adequate training opportunities and absence of strong trade unions have all been attributed to the concentration of outlets within conglomerates and a rise in “alternative” trade associations that, according to panelists, are more willing to cooperate with the government.

According to the majority of the panelists, journalists do not trust the professional unions and there is a very low level of professional solidarity. People look to support provided by informal initiatives that, for example, assisted Mediapool reporter Boris Mitov and DW freelancers Emmy Barouh and Ivan Bedrov in the cases against Corporate and Commercial Bank and the prosecutor’s office respectively.

While there are some NGO’s working to support free speech and independent media, their impact is relatively limited.

Funding for such NGO's is practically non-existent, as they survive on a project-by-project basis, which ultimately hinders the development of effective professional and legal services to protect independent media in Bulgaria.

As in past years, there continues to be a lack of quality journalism degree programs in Bulgaria able to provide substantial practical experience and prepare young journalists for the difficult working environment. With the exception of the American University in Blagoevgrad, Sofia State, and the New Bulgarian University, the general level and quality of journalism education received low scores from the panelists due to outdated media curricula and a disconnect between the education received and the needs of the media industry.

Due to a lack of funding, there are limited opportunities for journalists in Bulgaria to participate in short-term training to update and acquire new skills. "The media do not invest in training their staff (with the exception of TV7) as editors request their reporters to cover multiple beats and write numerous stories, which inevitably results in low quality pieces, especially in regional media," according to Daskalova.

The channels of media distribution including newspaper kiosks and digital broadcast transmitters are monopolized, thereby restricting access for independent media in Bulgaria. However, the trend is reversing due to proposed changes to the legislation governing concentration of newspaper sales and digital broadcasting networks.

The Bulgarian media sector enjoys availability and access to sources of media equipment and printing facilities, and excellent information and communication technology

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, cable, Internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

infrastructure. Citizens benefit from a free and highly competitive communications sector, with multiple providers of cable and Internet services offering good packages of television, fixed phone lines, and fast optical Internet access at very low prices.

## List of Panel Participants

**Nelly Ognyanova**, professor of European media law, Sofia University; director, The Bulgarian Institute for Legal Development, Sofia

**Yassen Boyadzhiev**, chair, Free Speech Forum; editor, Mediapool.bg, Sofia

**Dimitar Radev**, chair, Bulgarian Association of Cable and Communications Operators, Sofia

**Stoyana Georgieva**, editor-in-chief, Mediapool.bg, Sofia

**Ivan Radev**, Bulgaria representative, Association of European Journalists, Sofia

**Dilyana Kirkovska**, chief expert, Council for Electronic Media, Monitoring Directorate, Sofia

**Konstantin Markov**, media lecturer, independent producer, Sofia

**Ivan Michalev**, editor-in-chief, *Trud*, Sofia

**Vesselin Vassilev**, owner, Radio Sevlievo, Sevlievo

**Ivo Draganov**, journalism professor, New Bulgarian University and the National Academy for Theater and Film Arts, Sofia

**Dimitar Lipovanski**, journalist and producer, Arena Media, Russe

**Asen Grigorov**, journalist and producer, Bulgarian National Television, Sofia

**Nicoletta Daskalova**, media expert and lecturer, Media Democracy Foundation, Sofia

**Rositzka Donkova**, manager, Action Bulgaria public relations agency, Sofia

**Ivan Kanevchev**, director, municipal radio; board member, Union of Bulgarian Journalists, Pleven

## Moderator and Author

**Petko Georgiev**, journalist, producer, and media consultant, BTC ProMedia, Sofia

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