



foundation
media
democracy



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

**THE OTHER DUEL:
THE CLASH OF OLD AND NEW MEDIA**
2012 BULGARIAN MEDIA MONITORING

SUMMARY OF THE 2012 ANNUAL REPORT
OF FOUNDATION MEDIA DEMOCRACY

IN COOPERATION WITH

THE MEDIA PROGRAM SOUTH EAST EUROPE
OF KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG

Sofia, 2013

As in previous years, the 2012 report of Foundation Media Democracy (FMD) has been prepared by the team of the Media Monitoring Lab (MML) in cooperation with the Media Program South East Europe of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Apart from the Lab members (Nikoleta Daskalova, Gergana Kutzeva, Silvia Petrova, Marina Kirova, Bogdana Dencheva, Vasilena Yordanova, Eli Aleksandrova and Maya Tzaneva), two external experts have been involved, i.e. Georgi Lozanov and Vyara Angelova. By tradition, the FMD annual report does not melt down individual contribution of analyzers into an anonymous expert discourse, but rather brings to the fore the diversity of their individual points of view. The main accents of the report, by areas of monitoring, include:

MEDIA WARS

Media wars were the 2012 hit. They were, actually, not exactly wars between the media themselves, but rather between the privately owned capitals backing them up. Throughout the year, the tension was unfolding mainly in the press. One of the reasons thereof is the lack of any statutory regulation. The prominent asymmetry between the regulatory frameworks of the print and the electronic media gave rise to a new row of debates around the idea of introducing a press act in our country. Yet, no consensus has been reached. Journalists are still more afraid of rather than relying on an act, publishers might cherish some financial hopes but it is certainly not their priority, while politicians are reluctant to make decisions without the support of both journalists and publishers. In 2012 media wars spread beyond the press, and new media confronted traditional ones. The occasion was the ecological protest in the capital, organized through the social networks (the Orlov Most events). The protest turned against the TV channels too, especially against the one with the highest TV rating, protestors claiming about lack of objectivity in the TV coverage. The war was actually between the images of one event in two spheres of media publicity. Also to be reckoned within the range of media wars, which wars could be taken as dominant influence of the owners with

their contradictions over media content, could be the large-spread migration of independent TV productions between major TV channels.

Once gained popularity in one channel, the productions pass the fronts of the rivals into another channel without any remorse, motivated by the respective material benefits. The problem goes beyond owners and producers, resulting in the programme depersonalization of the media as a whole.

■ NATIONAL DAILIES

The print media publicity remains dominated by the personality of the Prime Minister. Apart from him, it is the President and the Chair of the National Assembly that receive unambiguous support in the media. This in practice means that the three key statespersons in 2012 fall outside the range of the serious criticism in the press. The papers are moderately critical to the government and its members. The more critical reviews are, to a large extent, reserved for the opposition leaders and parties. There is a significant difference between the approval of political figures and institutions in society on one side, and in the media, on the other. For example, an opinion poll made in September 2012 by the renowned social research agency Alpha Research showed that the opinion for the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov in society was rather polarized, where 'the mistrust in the PM Boyko Borisov exceeds the confidence in him – 37% to 32%'. At the same time, the Market Links data unambiguously showed a warm attitude towards Mr. Borisov in almost all monitored papers, as well as a high media rating of the PM. Thus, many media are evidently 'pumping up' the public images of key politicians. The mismatch between the public opinion and the image built by the media is a clear sign of direct PR support, but also of a direct dependence of some of the media on state power conjuncture.

■ RADIO

Radio remains the most preserved media compared to the fast tabloidization in the press and the TV. The key event during the year was the coverage of the earthquake in the town of Pernik (May 2012). In this extreme situation, the public relied on radio more than on the

rest of the media, but remained disappointed by the speed and quality of information. The reason – Bulgarian radio stations offer too much music and not enough speech. Even the few speech radio stations had difficulties in keeping watch in critical moments, which proved that the development and implementation of plans for radio reaction in distress situations are extremely needed.

An interesting phenomenon in radio broadcasting is the TV speech taking the place of the dying out radio speech. The success of the bTV Radio and Radio Bulgaria On Air has showed that radio is, after all, developing.

The immediate future of radio is connected to the digitization of the broadcasting in 2013. The Bulgarian National Radio was quick to advertise its readiness for a full switchover. The rest of the radio stations are for now standing a bit aside from the process, at least in public.

■ ONLINE MEDIA & NEWS SITES

The online information environment was dominated, for yet another year, by the figure of the PM Boyko Borisov. He remains the inevitable initiator of news in all public spheres – from the political, through the economic, financial and criminal, to the sports one. There has also been a strong tendency for a predominant institutional coverage, which gives significant advantage to the ruling party and devaluates information. In the meantime, news sites turn into an easy tribune for populist messages launched by both the government and the opposition. The President and the Prime Minister are the politicians enjoying the most favorable attitude on the part of information sites as a whole. A key moment during the year was the coverage of the protests on the Eagle's Bridge (Bulgarian: Orlov Most). There were two clearly discernible information streams on the net: the social media (mainly Facebook), the blogs, and some of the peripheral information sites confronted the mainstream media (information agencies, electronic media, and online versions of the press). Social media and sites helped the net gradually emancipate itself and offer a tribune for diverse and bold observations and comments. In Bulgaria there is already a strong tendency (typical mostly of countries with difficult media environment and insufficiency of democracy) for the blogs, social networks and civil

media to play the role of a compensatory mechanism by filling-in gaps of lack of information, analyses and objective points of view on issues uncomfortable for the mass media.

■ EUROPE (EUROPEAN ISSUES IN BULGARIAN MEDIA)

The coverage of European issues in Bulgarian media is predominated by publications that place the accent on national problems. The interest of the journalists to supranational issues and analysis of European policies is limited. Against this background, the information environment was dominated by the government's declarative emphasis on results achieved through the use of European funds. Within the context of the Bulgarian public sphere, the EU label is still used for PR purposes from both the government and the opposition. During the second half of 2012, this tendency was complemented by a new shade, i.e. the uncritical attitude of the media towards the government and the projects implemented by it with European funds has started to crack and change to neutral and critical one.

■ LIFESTYLE

While in 2011 the focus on the appearance and personal life of politicians activated mainly during the pre-election campaign, in 2012 this became a widely used and expected technique, adopted by the entertainment and central media alike. The wide circulation of the lifestyle discourse nears the construction of political images to the mechanisms of the social network Facebook. Politicians tend to create their identities following the Facebook rules – offering only amusing and original pieces of themselves to satisfy the curiosity of the electorate and their own vanity. The mass implementation of the lifestyle rhetoric could be explained by the fact that it is perceived as the opposite side of conflict speaking adopted by some media. The 2012 novelty is the increased presence of man politicians in lifestyle media. Lifestyle becomes one of the most preferred and effective instruments for political PR.

■ **YELLOW PRESS (The Vseki Den and Bulgaria Dnes daily newspapers)**

In 2012, Vseki Den abandoned its negative campaign against Meglena Kuneva and in the meantime adopted a more positive attitude towards Boyko Borisov. On its part, Bulgaria Dnes increased its interest in Mrs. Kuneva and SDS. However, as a whole, politics was not the central issue. Priority issues were natural calamities and apocalypses. There was a tendency of tabloid content overflowing into the print media, the highest interest attracted by the reality show VIP Brother. In 2012, yellow dailies adopted the role of obituaries – blew the horn over tragic events mixed with the feeling of undelivered justice (the events in the village of Katunitza), and even the decease of Patriarch Maxim was turned into a tabloid sensation.

■ **BLOGOSPHERE**

In 2012, the blogosphere, and the social media in general, was more irreconcilable, operative and active. The event of the year was the protests against the amendments in the Forest Act on the Orlov Most, where the demonstrators had spontaneously organized themselves via blogs, Twitter, Facebook. It was the social media who were most active in the dissemination of information on the events on Orlov Most. In 2012, bloggers turned from reasoning and writing to acting, from criticizing to sobering down, from confronting to cooperating. Apart from the Forest Act, bloggers discussed actively and critically subjects like the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), the shale gas extraction, nuclear power, the problems in the judicial system. The most widely discussed persons throughout the year were the Minister of Interior Tzvetan Tzvetanov and the PM Boyko Borisov – both as objects of disapproval and utter irony.

■ **FACEBOOK**

2012 was the year of awakening of civil society. There were numerous demonstrations where citizens gave their voice to their discontent with certain events and policies. A large number of the protests were organized in Facebook, and the civil mobilizations made traditional

media show greater consideration of the voice of the public. The lack of coverage in the commercial media of the civil initiatives stirred a wave of discontent in the social networks. As a result, civil activities of any kind, regardless of the modest number of participants thereof, are currently covered in central news programs. The most popular politicians on Facebook in 2012 were Boyko Borisov, Meglena Kuneva and Ivan Kostov. However, as a whole, the number of Bulgarian politicians with adequate presence in the virtual space in the last non-election year was very limited. The tradition of mobilizing the channels of communication with the voters only on the eve of elections has reinforced. The virtual campaigns of the Bulgarian politicians are still being managed rather awkwardly, or are simply missing.

VBOX7

The main events during the past year according to the video materials uploaded in Vbox7 are the demonstrations, natural calamities and political scandals. The protagonist in the videos of political content is the PM Boyko Borisov, whose blunders raise the smile or the indignation of the public. The most active parties in the video network are the nationalistic ones. As a whole, the serious political problems fall outside the interest of the user.

In 2012 there is a persistent tendency for media content to prevail over original content of authorship. There is one exception to that – with the ‘coverage’ of protest demonstrations and natural calamities, user videos now exceed in number media ones.



w w w . f m d . b g