News Media as a Social Factor for Law Enforcement in the Republic of Macedonia

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Abstract

The transition period in the Republic of Macedonia has revealed problematic issues related to the development of democracy. The fight against corruption, consolidation of the rule of law, implementation of the Macedonian-Albanian peace agreement and the need for new constitutional changes remain challenges for the Macedonian society. This paper focuses on the role of the news media in raising awareness for fundamental reforms to build a stable co-existence of ethnic communities in Macedonia. These reforms are considered to pave the path toward European integration process. Alsat-M represents a unique television in the Republic of Macedonia that focuses its reporting mission on broadcasting bilingual information for Albanian and Macedonian audience and it's taken as a case study in this paper. The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of media in changing social mentality and in undertaking important social changes even in societies that have special peculiarities. A complex theoretical framework is used to analyze the correlations between Alsat-M reporting and the political and administrative reactions and changes in Macedonia. Agenda-setting and Framing theories are implemented in pair with statistical and discourse analysis.

Keywords: Alsat-M, rule of law, Albanian language, Macedonia.

1. Introduction

The government of Republic of Macedonia, known internationally as FYROM, is largely critiqued by international institutions for "growing restrictions on independent journalism", for increased level of corruption and weakness of democracy, what makes Macedonia being categorized under "transitional/hybrid regimes"¹. The public sphere is full of patriotic discourses and populist actions produced by the government (embodied in projects such as for example "Skopje 2014"), in front of many emergent real problems of which suffers the country such as the institutional nationalism, lack of transparency of public money, and the worsened interethnic relations. The government hasn't accomplished the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement signed in 13 August 2001 with the mediation of international community². In Macedonia the population is divided ethnically and the cohabitation is still fragile even after 13 years after this peace agreement³. The concern of this paper is about the right use of the Albanian language according to the peace agreement. It is the second official language of the country as mother tongue of Albanian population which is more than 30 percent (Ndrio Karameti, 2011).

This ethnic division is reflected on the media market as well. Except some news portals, the Macedonian and the Albanian language media still function separately. In 2011 the biggest opposite media group, in Macedonian and Albanian language, (*A1 television*, and the newspapers *Spic, Vreme* and *Koha e Re*) was closed and what rests in the media market is partly or totally controlled⁴. On December 2013 the parliament adopted the controversial law for the media which consists on the built of a government dominated agency to serve as the media regulator in Macedonia.

¹ According to the European Commission (2014). The Former Republic of Macedonia Progress Report 2013. [ONLINE] Available at: the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia_2013.pdf-. [Last Accessed 17.04.2014], According to the Freedom House report (2014). Nations in transit: Eurasia rupture with democracy. [Online] Available at: http://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/ NIT2014%20booklet_Website.pdf. [Last Accessed 17.04.2014].

² According to the vice prime minister Musa Xhaferi. Alsat-M (10.06.2013). The implementation of the Ohrid Agreement not satisfactory. [Online] Available at: 7006-zbatimi-i-marreveshjes-se-ohrit-jo-i-kenaqshem.html-. [Last Accessed 16.05.2014].

³ Alsat-M (07.09.2013). Macedonia, 22 year independence, the cohabitation fragile. [Online] Available at: 9357-maqedoni-22-vjet-pavaresi-bashkejetesa-e-brishte.html-. [Last Accessed 10.06.2014].

⁴ Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso (07.02.2011). Macedonia, parlamento a spasso. [Online] Available at: Macedonia-parlamento-aspasso-88513. [Last Accessed 12.05.2014]. International Media Support (04.11.2011). Macedonian media at an all time law". [online] Available at: http://www.i-m-s.dk/macedonian-media-at-an-all-time-law. [Last Accessed 12.05.2014].

Furthermore, according to the head of the Journalist' Association of Macedonia, the government pays 20 million euros per year for advertising inappropriate issues on media. Those advertising funds are distributed according to a selective policy which aims to control the media content through public money⁵. The punishments against journalists are drastic, such as prison⁶. Fines for journalists are higher than in EU countries. In the Albanian camp media, the only big media is the television *Alsat-M*, a bilingual one, a unique media of this kind, in Macedonia. This medium, is facing time to time the pressure of government control as well⁷.

Alsat-M television is the most credible channel in Macedonia, from both Albanian and Macedonian viewers⁸. It has the absolute influence over the Albanian speaking audience. Its role in the controversial Macedonian society is forged through the coverage of a number of crucial issues for the Albanian speaking audience but not only. This is made in both Albanian and Macedonian languages. This bilingual way of producing is contributing for both separated audiences to understand the problems as citizens of the same country and to define their differed points of view.

One recent and sensitive issue largely covered by this medium is the use of the Albanian language, together with Macedonian language, for services offered by all the public enterprises. The Albanian language use issue is regulated by law, after having been sanctioned by the Ohrid Agreement: the Albanian language should be used publically as a second language on the areas where the Albanian population is more than 20%. For several months the *Alsat-M* television denounced the lack of use of Albanian language by enterprises of public services, that means the violation of law. This violation is condemned with prison according to the Article 138 of Penal Code of Republic of Macedonia.

The analysis in this paper focuses on the role of this bilingual media as a social factor for raising awareness about the rule of law in Macedonia. The investigation of *Alsat-M* and the denunciation of the legal aspects not respected by the public administration as well as the highlight of responsible persons, putting them in front of the citations from the Constitution, are elements of contribution for law enforcement, which is one of the conditions for Macedonia imposed by the European Union in order to follow the integration process.

2. Methodology

The impact media may have to the public and political agenda is best examined by agenda-setting theory, both its first and second levels. For the purposes of this paper, the first level agenda-setting theory, which deals with what media choses to put in the audience's attention, helps us to inquire the importance the Albanian speaking television gives to certain social and political issues in Macedonia, putting them into its agenda and making the audience "think about them" (McCombs, 2004). The second level agenda-setting, further developed as framing theory which deals with certain aspects of the selected issues and drives the audience the way "how to think about" (Entman, 1993; McCombs, 2004), allows us to look into the frames used by *Alsat-M* television for accentuation of certain problematic aspects of the issue in order to put them in the focus of the public agenda and political agenda in Macedonia. This coverage of the news through their particularities is the fruit of the journalists' care which means the journalists are those who choose the angle that will be used to organize the whole information. That means they are who preselect the frame they will use to put the news in (Ndrio Karameti, 2011).

These two communication theories are implemented through two methods both quantitative and qualitative. The first method is the statistical analysis of media content. All news reports texts are scanned for collecting the statistical

⁵ According to Naser Selmani, head of the Journalists' Association of Macedonia. Alsat-M (11.12.2013). The power tends to put the media under its claws. [Online] Available at: http://alsat-m.tv/lajme/nga_vendi/12063-pushteti-tenton-te-fus-mediat-nen-kthetrat-e-saja.html. [Last Accessed 22.05.2014]. According to the publisher Arben Ratkoceri and journalist Ljubisha Nikollovski. Alsat-M (21.06.2013). Media under different forms of pressure from the government. [Online] Available at: http://alsat-m.tv/lajme/nga_vendi/7295-mediat-forma-te-ndryshme-presioni-nga-pushteti.html 21.06.2013. [Last Accessed 22.05.2014].

⁶ Such as the case of journalist Tomislav Kezarovski who was kept on pretrial detention for several months and after that was sentenced to four years of prison for an information published in a opposite Macedonian language media. Mentioned at Freedom House Report (2014). Nations in transit: Eurasia rupture with democracy. [Online] Available at: http://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2014%20booklet_WEBSITE.pdf . [Last Accessed 17.04.2014].

⁷ Alsat-M (23.11.1013). MPB-ja ankohet ndaj raportimit te Alsat rreth incidenteve. [Online] Available at: http://alsatm.tv/lajme/nga_vendi/11574-mpb-ja-ankohet-ndaj-raportimit-te-alsat-rreth-incidenteve.html. [Last Accessed 27.05.2014].

Alsat-M (29.11.2013). Parashtresa e MPB-sö, körcönim ndaj Alsatit. [Online] Available at: http://alsat-m.tv/lajme/nga_vendi/11765-selmani-parashtresa-e-mpb-se-kercenim-ndaj-alsatit.html. [Last Accessed 27.05.2014].

⁸ According to the polls of "FOKUS" & "Rejting". Alsat-M (21.02.2014). Alsat-M, the most credible television in Macedonia. [Online] Available at: http://alsat-m.tv/lajme/nga_vendi/14007-alsat-m-televizioni-me-i-besueshem-ne-maqedoni.html. [Last Accessed 27.05.2014].

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data concerning the total amount of time this medium dedicated to this issue. This includes total time of reporting on the proper issue and total time reporting on the political reactions following the first reports about the issue, in order to understand the importance of this issue for the channel's news agenda (Entman, 2004; McCombs & Ghyi Hsiang, 2004; Protess & McCombs 1991). The second method deals with the analysis of the discourse produced by journalists of this medium and their point of view which represents the editorial policy. This frame analysis is designed after the first level analysis. This strategy allows us to first scan the news reports titles and content in order to understand the main theme of this reporting. Doing so, we gained insights about this main theme which is "the non-respect of the Albanian language in public spaces by public institutions is against the laws of the Constitution of the country". The conclusion drove us to the establishment of a frame which will be the element of the analysis. This analysis is made upon a pre-determined frame which is the "rule of law". We scanned the texts in order to detect and test two hypothesis:

- a) This frame helped journalists to shape the approach of news writing about the issue of Albanian language use by the Macedonian public institutions.
- b) This frame is used by the reporters to shape their interpretative angle s.

Our analysis lays on 13 months, which is the intensive coverage of this thematic by the television channel. The data are mainly retrieved by the on line archive of *Alsat-M*⁹. Due to the establishment of a new server, the archive of the television doesn't contains any more news items older than the day of server replacement. To accomplish the research goals of this paper, the rest of the data is retrieved by *YouTube* where are published almost all news reports produced by this television channel. Some information details are kindly provided by the journalists of *Alsat-M* via email.

3. Data Presentation and Analysis

Alsat-M started this reporting on early 2013 and continued it for about thirteen months intensively. In total there are 25 reports on this theme during this timeframe. The *Table1* presents the descriptive statistical data about the reports, divided according to five topics under the broad thematic "use of Albanian language" from the public services. Most of these topics concern the services offered by public enterprises depend from the Municipality of the capital Skopje. Only one enterprise depends from the Ministry of Transportation. Another topic concerns the use of Albanian language from the municipality itself, during the council meetings, at the municipality of the region Çuçer Sandeva (the council is composed by Macedonian and Albanian members. Meetings are hold in Macedonian but they are supposed to be translated in Albanian).

	Use of Albanian language in:	Alerting reports	Follow of Political reactions reports	Total number of reports	Total time of coverage (minutes)	Problem solved: Totally / Partially /Not at all
1	Urban buses' indications (Public Transport Enterprise)	4	9	13	28.01	Partially
2	Street tables (Public Enterprise Roads of Macedonia)	1	2	3	6.21	Totally
3	Urban Signalization (Public Enterprise of Parks and Greenery)	1	3	4	6.89	Not at all (suspended)
4	Bills of water (Public Enterprise of Waters and Sewerage)	1	1	2	4.86	Partially
5	Council meetings of Municipality of Çuçer Sandeva)	2	1	3	6.22	Totally
	TOTAL reports	9	16	25	52.19	

Table 1: Statistical data about the amount of time dedicated to the theme by *alsat-m*.

All topics analyzed in this paper are: 1. The use of Albanian language in the urban buses' indications by the *Public Transport Enterprise*, 2. The use of Albanian language at the street tables by the public enterprise *Roads of Macedonia (Makedonija Pat)*, 3. The use of Albanian language at the urban signalization by the *Pubic Enterprise of Parks and*

⁹ The official web page of Alsat-M television: www.alsat-m.tv.

Greenery, 4. The use of Albanian language at the bills of water consumption by the *Public Enterprise of Waters and Sewerage* 5. The use of Albanian language during the meetings of the municipality of region Çuçer Sandeva. Statistical data of first column in *Table1* refers to the number of reports per topic, followed at second column by the total reports about reactions of authorities after the issues were put in the media agenda that means after the issues were made part of the public agenda. The third column/group of data concerns to the total time is devoted to those topics. Forth column contains information about resolution of the problem of the Albanian language's use, after the issue was put on the media agenda and on the political agenda. The information for confirming the problem solution is provided from two journalists who mainly covered and still follow these stories, Valmir Kuçi and Benjamin Arifi.

The reading of all news texts in order to scan its content and verify if the frame "rule of law" helped journalists to be unbiased resulted with confirmation of first hypothesis "the frame helped journalists to shape the approach of news writing about the issue". The content of news reports is shaped following the line: noticed violation of law, denouncing it in comparison to the law, asking responsible officials. We deduce by confirming the second hypothesis "the frame is used by the reporters to shape their interpretative angle s" as well; the interpretive angle s were constructed following the first part of the news report with the arguing line: interpreting the situation, following the problem solution and results. The discourse produced by the journalists of Alsat-M is constructed upon the frame "rule of law". This frame is used as a safe model to raise a very important issue for the Albanian population/audience but apparently irrelevant for officials. The reading (listening) of the news reports, makes obvious the latent main point they mentioned that is; the law is not respected because of bureaucrats with a certain nationalist mentality who feel comfortable to act that way because the whole political system allows them. In this situation, the journalists of Albanian ethnicity of Alsat-M, would have been intimidated to raise the issue of use of their own language by the public institutions and to rigorously insist on its solution, if they had shaped the report as a principle issue only. The "rule of law" frame with strong reference to the Constitution. made them have a clear platform to present to the authorities. The repetition of the references to the "Article 138 of the Penal Code", "three to five years of prison for persons who obstruct the implementation of the law for the use of languages", "Article 7 Paragraph 2 of the Law for labeling the streets, squares, bridges and other infrastructure facilities", etc., helped them to construct the appropriate news frame. It is this frame which gave them the legitimacy to not only investigate but to interpret as well. In a professional way and totally "politically correct" the journalists have all said directly and between the lines.

A comparative discourse analysis of the first to issues covered, as showed in Table1, "the urban buses' indications" and "the street tables", shows evident results of this discourse. In the first issue (partially solved), the director of the Public Transportation Enterprise is of Macedonian ethnicity. At the report of 23.09.2013, titled "Albanian language on the buses, the director ignores the secretariat for the implementation of Ohrid Agreement"¹⁰, the discourse focuses on the negligence of the issue by the head of this enterprise who is the main responsible for the implementation of all obligations arising from the law. The news rapport mentions: "Nearly eight months after the alert of Alsat-M, the Public Transport Enterprise Skopje continues to skip the official use of the language in its urban buses. [...] Alsat-M tried again today to take statement from director Misho Nikollov, but the enterprise refused"11. Eight months earlier a NGO made an accusation in the prosecution against this public enterprise and its director but nothing happened. The persistence in covering the topic, the reference to law and the raise of issue at the level of public and political agenda, influenced the official's attitude towards it. At the report of 24.09.2013 Alsat-M informs about political reactions at the Council of the City which proposed to discuss the firing of the director and to condemn him for non-respect to the law. Some days after, at the report of 03.10.2013, Alsat-M informs that the director declared publically: "we now have our website in Albanian, as all documents and stamps that are circulating in our endeavor are bilingual. [...] electronic buses signs are written in both languages, so that our enterprise is one that respects bilingualism". On the report of 18.10.2013 Alsat-M informs that the City Council voted to not fire the director who didn't respect the law for the use of languages even after a long and wide coverage of thirteen news reports in total 28.01 minutes of broadcasting. The overall result is that the issue remains not totally solved. The indications of urban buses are working in some buses' lines but not in all buses' lines of the capital Skopie.

Differently runs the story about street tables which are under the competence of public enterprise Roads of Macedonia (*Makedonija Pat*), showed at *Tables1* as totally solved. Its director is of Albanian ethnicity and the story took place when this enterprise put some road tables written in Albanian language as well, to indicate some tourist places over the highways. Another public service, the *Public Enterprise of State Roads*, headed by a director of Macedonian ethnicity, asked to the Ministry of Transportation to remove these road tables set by Macedonia Road. *Alsat-M* covered the debate

¹⁰ Our translation. Original title of news report: « Shqipja në autobusë, drejtori shpërfill Inspektoriatin për implementimin e MO-së".

¹¹ Our translation.

between these two public enterprises trying to discover the truth about this controversial request. The discourse is shaped through the statements of public officials involved. At the report of 04.09.2013 titled "Removing tables in two languages, Albanians sharply against"¹², the journalist cites the Albanian director of this public enterprise who declares: "*There is not year 1983 anymore, we are now in 2013, there are laws on the use of language*". The same position represents the citation from the statement of the vice minister of Public Transportation, who is of Albanian ethnicity as well: "*If someone's goal is to prevent the use of the Albanian language in those tables, is completely wrong and those tables will not be removed because they are written in Albanian. If the problem is that procedures are not respected, we will see the ways to respect the procedures"* ¹³. Both citations used by the reporter allowed to shape a discourse within the frame "rule of law". Both officials mentioned the law and use of languages, so that the whole discourse in the news is built around its appropriate use in the case of these road tables. The next day's report, further highlights the procedural steps of this issue. The news report of 10.10.2013 informs that the road tables will not be removed because they are put according to the law. The *Macedonia Road* and the Ministry of Transportation won the case. *Alsat-M* was made a factor of transparency for the controversies and misunderstandings between public institutions, which serves to the "rule of law". Comparing to the issue of buses' tables which took about two years and still is partially solved, this issue took only one month to get solved. That tells a lot about the willingness to respect the law and the role of media on highlighting it.

The other three topics covered, as shown at *Table1*, have different ends. The urban signalization (3rd one) is not solved yet but the city of Skopje has appointed a commission who is working to interpret the Law for use of languages and the Law for the City of Skopje. Until this commission gives conclusions, the issue remains suspended. Meanwhile in Skopje there are tables in Albanian language as well as tables only in Macedonian language. The topic about the bills of water (4th one) is partially solved. The bills are not written in both languages for all clients but only for them who ask such a thing. Administrators of this public enterprise say they are working to definitely solve this issue. The topic about municipality council meetings (5th one) is totally solved. After only one report from *Alsat-M*, the municipality of Çuçer Sandeva reacted politically. Now, the municipality council is respecting the use of Albanian language; Albanian members have the right to speak in their mother tongue, the meeting discussions are translated from Macedonian to Albanian and the inverse and all documentation is used in both languages.

As shown from the analysis, after the alert made from the reporters and after the persistent coverage, the issue was put on the political agenda. The reports about the political meeting and their debates about the concerned issues and local/central government officials' statements confirm the effects that initial reporting had over political actors. The issues are treated according to the frame used by the journalists: "the rule of law". Officials reacted following this angle of discussion that was "the use of the Albanian language is an obligation from the law and we are working to fulfill it". This angle is obvious in their responses to the questions that means they are following the discourse according to the frame constructed by the journalists (as in the statement of the director about buses indications). So, the reporting are often followed by political reactions and the television's agenda is followed by the political agenda as shown in Table1. The correlation between the media agenda and the political agenda is very strong, even if the whole juridical system is not functioning according to the European recommendations. However, this tie confirms the influence that the consistent reporting of journalists had over the political agenda concerning the issue of the use of the Albanian language in public areas. The pressure of this reporting forced officials to think seriously about the consequences of law violation which are mentioned almost every time from the journalists (6 months to 5 years of prison). The Macedonian law is clear about the issue: "Who will take away or restrict the right of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution, law or ratified international agreements for the use of language, shall be punished by 3 months to 3 years in prison. If the crime is committed by an official in duty, he will be punished with imprisonment from 6 months to 5 years". The frame "rule of law" helped not only journalists to build their discourse and do interpretations, but it helped as well to impose the issue of right implementation of law for use of languages to the agenda and to the attention of nationalist points of view of some public officials in Macedonia.

4. Conclusion

This paper explored the correlation between the media agenda and the political agenda concerning the rule of law in Macedonia in a way that media becomes a social factor for the law enforcement. The case of *Alsat-M* television, the only bilingual one in this multiethnic and multilingual country, on investigating and covering the right use of second official language of the country in public areas, proves that influential media may go beyond formal reporting even in

¹² Our translation. Original title of news report: "Heqja e tabelave në dy gjuhë, shqiptarët kundërshtojnë ashpër".

¹³ Our translations.

controversial societies on hybrid regimes and may have a strong impact over forging democracy and rule of law. This Albanian language television has professionally set its agenda and made appropriate news framing in order to influence the decision making levels of administration for changing both agenda and mentality and improve the implementation of law. Journalists built a legitimate frame which is "rule of law" to alert about the violation of law concerning a national issue such as the use of Albanian language, in service of the more than 30 percent of the population in the country which is Albanian speaker. Doing reference to the Constitution of the country (revised once according to the Ohrid Agreement). they asked responsibility from the public administration head officials who are mostly of Macedonian ethnicity. This approach, resulted appropriate in most of the cases studied in this paper. It helped as a pattern for media reporting as well as for central and local government administration behavior in respecting the law, even when it is about "the other" ethnicity rights. Even some of the issues are not totally solved, now, after the reporting of Alsat-M, they are part of the political agenda. The journalists follow the developments and play the role of the guardian for the implementation of laws. Nevertheless, the issue of the appropriate and full use of Albanian as second official language in Macedonia remains open because the law is supposed to be implemented by all public institutions. This issue is only one of many issues guaranteed by Ohrid Agreement but not yet implemented. The expired time limit of this agreement and many political issues still unsolved are subject for demanding a new interethnic agreement and further constitutional improvements in Macedonia.

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