

Trust of Bulgarians in media has further decreased

Foundation Media Democracy (FMD) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) present survey and annual report 2015 on Bulgarian media

Only 12 percent of Bulgarians believe in the independence of media. According to a representative survey commissioned by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, trust in the media has further decreased. The public relations of politicians is negatively evaluated as well: 67 percent of the citizens feel insufficiently informed. Moreover, KAS and FMD presented their annual monitoring of political reporting. Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and President Rossen Plevneliev are perceived more positively than before.

The Bulgarian media sector still has a poor reputation. "Only every eighth Bulgarian believes in true freedom of media", explained Christian Spahr, Head of the Media Program South East Europe of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. According to the opinion poll, 65 percent of the citizens disagree that media are free. Many remain indecisive and only 12 percent explicitly believe in free media reporting. The institute "Market Links" interviewed 1,000 Bulgarians for the survey (December 2015).

"There is no systematic repression of critical journalists in Bulgaria. However, media freedom is restricted by scattered pressure from political actors, media owners and advertising customers, as well as by unstable employment conditions and self-censorship", Spahr adds. Reasons for the lack of independence are furthermore the trend towards monopolisation in the newspaper sector, inefficient legal regulation and weak self-regulation. In a worldwide context, Bulgaria's press freedom is currently ranked 106th (Reporters Without Borders). KAS has already published several studies concerning the media crisis and pressure on journalists in Bulgaria.

Citizens think that they are insufficiently informed by politicians, too. Two thirds (67 percent) of Bulgarians evaluate the public relations of politicians as poor or very poor. The survey focused on the political class in general and did not distinguish between government authorities and political parties. "High-ranking politicians need to invest more in a modern and transparent information policy," concluded KAS expert Spahr. He added that the KAS Media Program South East Europe offers workshops for communication experts from the public sector and political parties, in order to give professional support to press officers.

According to an annual media monitoring of KAS and FMD, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov is still the most frequently mentioned personality in the political news. He extended his resonance and was mentioned in 23 percent of the analysed reports and news programmes (Basis: 2015; TV channels

BNT, bTV, Nova TV; newspapers Trud, Telegraph). The second most frequently mentioned personality is President Rossen Plevneliev.

Borissov and Plevneliev were most positively described among all high-ranking politicians in media. According to FMD, the "media rating" of Borissov is 3.1. This means that the Prime Minister is mentioned three times more in positive context than in negative context. Plevneliev's rating is 1.9 (analysed media: TV channels BNT, bTV, Nova TV; newspapers Trud, Telegraph, 24 hours; and news portals Blitz, Dnevnik, Offnews; April–December 2015). In 2014 the media image of Borissov and Plevneliev was rather critical. In 2015, the media reported negatively among others towards Volen Siderov (party Ataka, media-rating -8.6), Radan Kanev (-4.3), Lyutvi Mestan (-1.6) and Mihail Mikov (party leader BSP, -1.5).

„It is notable that political parties as such are less present in the media“, says the Managing Director of FMD, Orlin Spassov. „In general, media are focusing on persons and not on parties. Individual politicians are often perceived more positively than their respective party.“ Currently the media response is especially negative for the Bulgarian Socialists (BSP). Moreover, the party of the ethnical Turks (Movement for Rights and Freedoms, DPS) is perceived critically, with the exception of the newspaper Telegraph. The centre-right alliance Reformist Bloc, which is part of the government coalition, is criticised by several media outlets as well, and by others described neutrally. The party of Prime Minister Borissov, GERB, is equally supported and criticised by mainstream media, according to Spassov.

The European refugee crisis is mainly neutrally described in the Bulgarian media, according to the analysis of the Foundation Media Democracy. President Rossen Plevneliev is portrayed with an especially positive position towards refugees. A very critical stance towards refugees is associated in the media with the Bulgarian-orthodox church, representatives of the police and the Ministry of Interior. Minister of Interior Rumyana Bachvarova herself was mainly quoted with neutral or positive contributions.

The research institute Market Links analysed more than 40,000 news items of three daily newspapers (Trud, Telegraph, 24 hours), three television channels (BNT, bTV, Nova TV) and three online media (Blitz, Dnevnik, Offnews).

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