

COUNTRY REPORT

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

MEDIA PROGRAM
SOUTH EAST EUROPE
CHRISTIAN SPAHR

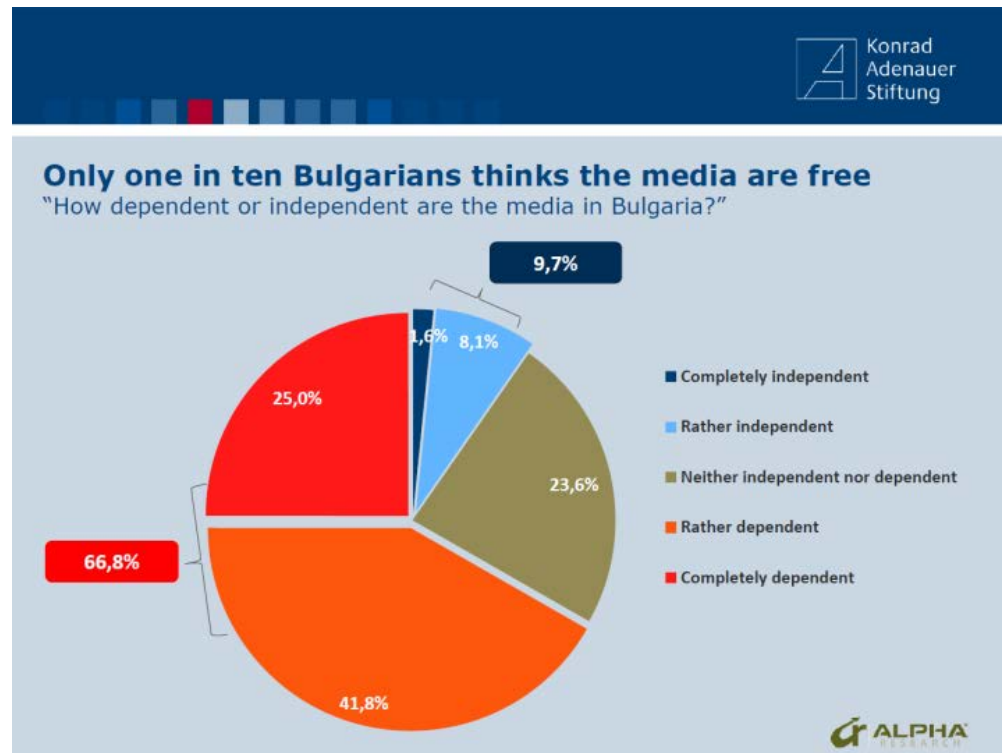
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Only every tenth Bulgarian thinks the media are independent

REPRESENTATIVE OPINION POLL ABOUT MEDIA FREEDOM AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION COMMISSIONED BY THE KAS MEDIA PROGRAM

The trust in Bulgarian media is at an all-time low. That is the result of a representative survey commissioned by the KAS Media Program South East Europe. Only one of ten Bulgarians (10 percent) believes that the media in Bulgaria are independent. The satisfaction with political communication is similarly low. Only 11 percent of the Bulgarians feel well informed about political decisions.



According to the international press freedom ranking by the non-governmental organisation "Reporters Without Borders", Bulgaria occupies rank 109 out of 180 countries worldwide. Now a new study, commissioned by KAS and conducted by the opinion research institute "Alpha Research", reveals that the public trust in media freedom and political communication is equally low ranked. The survey, which was published in November 2017, presents an opinion poll carried out among more than 1.000 Bulgarians above the age of 18. The survey shows: Only 10 percent of the Bulgarians think that the media are independent. 67 percent find them more or less dependent and 24 percent of the respondents were not sure whether the media are independent or not.

The survey also captured differences according to educational levels, age and residential areas in order to create a more detailed picture. The results reveal a noticeable consensus

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concerning media freedom among the different groups. In terms of confidence in independent media, there is no considerable difference in opinion between age groups as well as rural and urban population. It is, however, apparent that citizens in the capital of Sofia are the most sceptical toward media freedom. The figures underline the serious situation of media independence in Bulgaria and how critically it is perceived by the public. The difficult framework for media is mainly caused by high media ownership concentration, influence by political stakeholders, the economic crisis of the media sector as well as shortcomings in legislation and self-regulation.

Discrimination and defamation in the political debate

A further topic of the survey was the question of how much discrimination and defamation in political debates are visible in the Bulgarian media. 67 percent of the respondents noticed that politicians are targets of discrimination. "Insults, aggression and hate speech as well as a degrading tone against political opponents on television or in parliamentary debates are the reason why politicians are initiators and victims of discrimination at the same time", explains study leader Boriana Dimitrova of Alpha Research. Besides that, 54 percent of the Bulgarians see discrimination and defamation of national and ethnic minority groups reflected in the media coverage. 49 percent notice cases of discrimination against religious groups and 44 percent in the case of NGOs. The results indicate that discrimination and defamation in political debates are very common and are therefore frequently part of media reporting.

Critical attitude towards political communication

The communication efforts of Bulgarian politicians are judged as critically as the media freedom. A majority of Bulgarians (64 percent) does not feel well informed about political decision-making. Only 11 percent of the Bulgarians feel well or very well informed while 25 percent do not have a clear opinion on the topic. The results refer to communication of politicians in general including members of government and representatives of political parties.

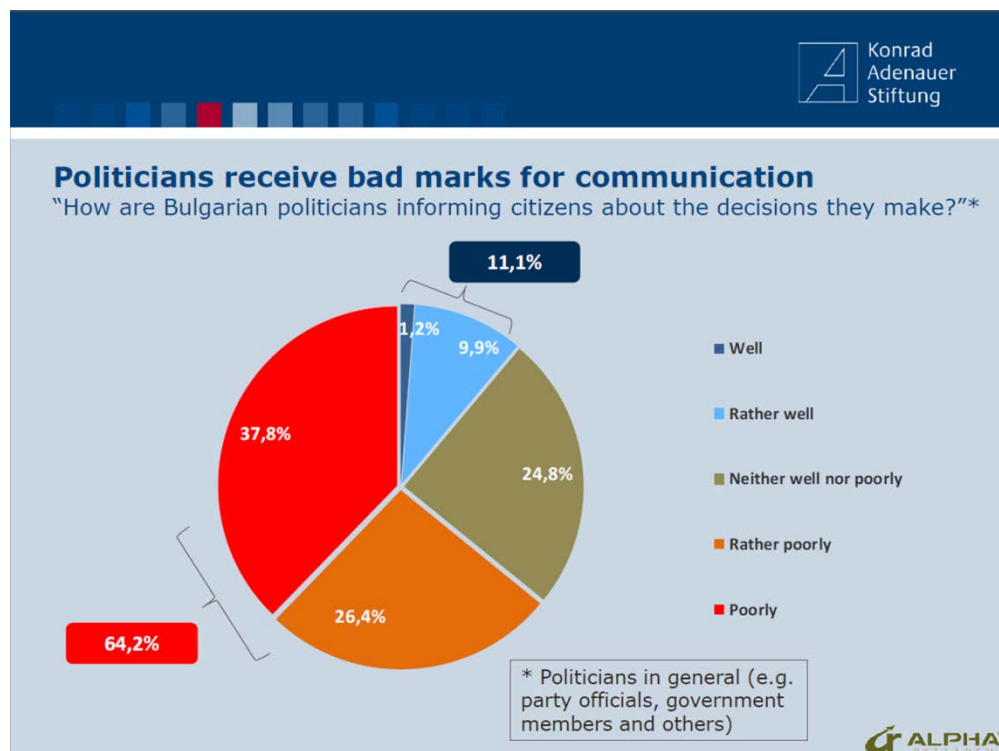
Again, the researchers compared responses of the different groups of the society. The biggest difference can be noticed in regard to the levels of education. While 68 percent of university graduates feel rather poorly or poorly informed, 56 percent of the respondents from lower educational levels feel the same way. The negative perception of political communication emphasises the strong desire of the public for more transparent information and a more intensive dialogue with the political elites.

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In times of European crises and the need for substantial reforms, politicians in South East Europe should invest more than ever before in professional communication. By organising seminars and conferences, the KAS Media Program South East Europe supports government and party spokespersons to communicate more efficiently. The government communication association SEECOM, which was co-founded by the Media Program, also helps senior communicators to develop a more transparent citizen dialogue. In addition, the KAS Media Program South East Europe recently published an expert book on new political communication trends which particularly describes the challenges of citizen dialogue in new EU member states and candidate countries.

The results of the survey were presented at the South East Europe Media Forum (SEEMF) on 27th November 2017 in Sofia. Around 300 participants were present at the conference. SEEMF is the biggest media conference in South East Europe and takes place every year in a different part of the region. Organisers of the event are the KAS Media Program South East Europe, the South East European Media Organisation (SEEMO) and the Central European Initiative (CEI).

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