

TOOTHLESS WATCHDOG: HOW THE MEDIA CRISIS CHALLENGES DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

CHRISTIAN SPAHR, KAS MEDIA PROGRAM
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SOUTH EAST EUROPE – MEDIA

- **Crisis of trust:** 12 % of Bulgarians believe in free media (2016; 28 % of Romanians, 2015)
- **Print crashes:** run of traditional nationwide newspapers 10-20.000 (example: Bulgaria)
- **TV unchallenged:** Main source of political information for 68 % of Bulgarian population and most trusted media for 54 %
- **Financial distress:** most media = loss-makers
- **Media freedom:** Negative tendencies – only 3 SEE countries with small progress (RWB 2016)
- **Reasons:** in most countries not oppression by state, but shortcomings in media sector itself



CHANGE OF INFORMATION CULTURE

- Internet: **no borders between consumers and producers** of information
- **Every second Bulgarian, Romanian, Serbian** uses internet (Germany 84%)
- Most internet users read news portals, some **discuss politics online**
- **Every fifth user creates content** (Bulgaria, Romania; Eurostat 2015)
- Citizens' **protests via internet** (Bulgaria 2013, BiH 2014, Macedonia 2015)
- **Independent news portals** and investigative media platforms gain popularity

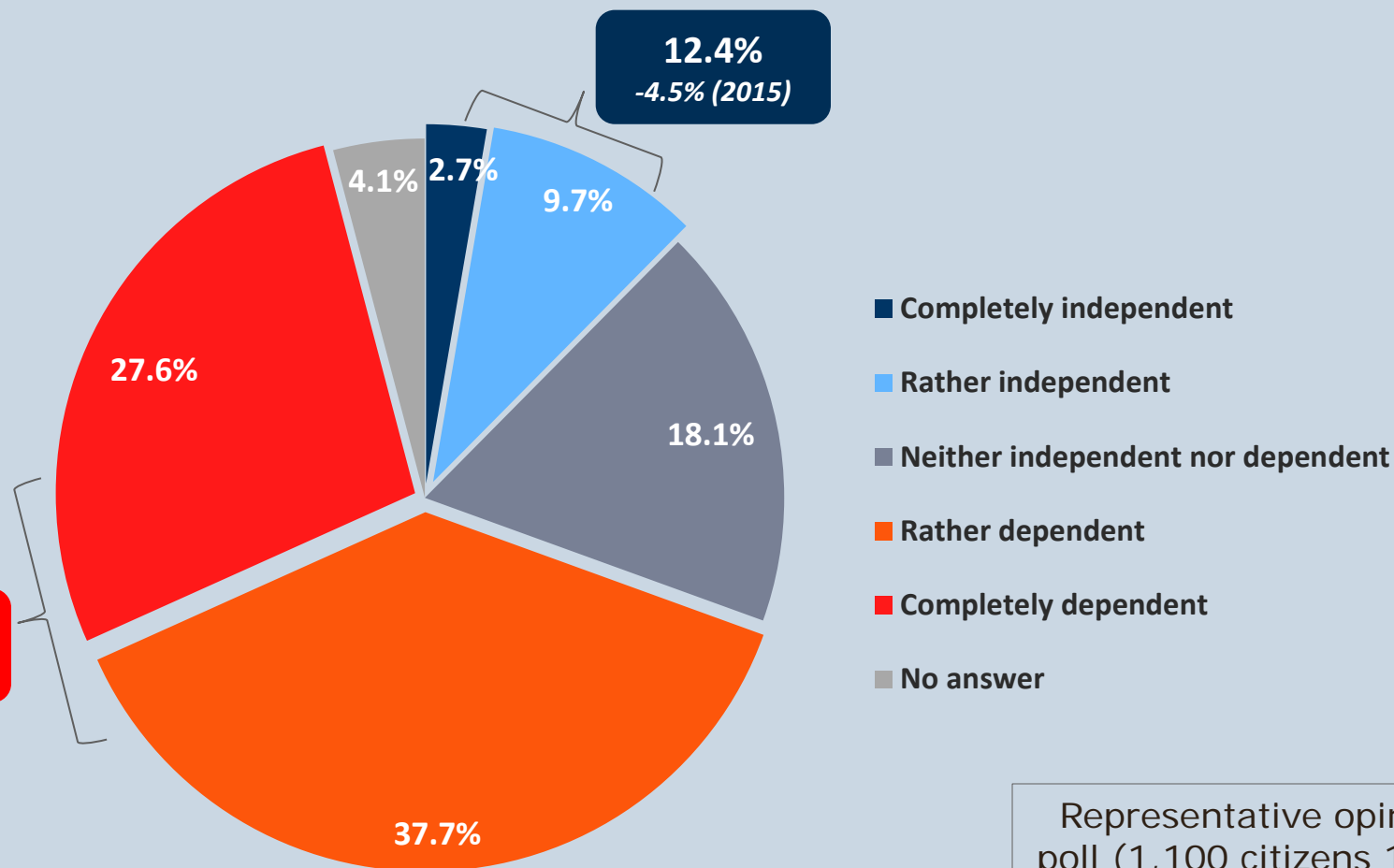
SURVEY: TRUST IN MEDIA (BULGARIA/ROMANIA)

- Target: Population, 18+, Bulgaria and Romania
- Methods of registration: Face-to-face interview (Bulgaria), Online interview (Romania)
- Sample design: Nationally representative for urban and rural population
- Sample size: 1,000 per country
- Fieldwork: December 2015/2014
- Design of questionnaire: KAS, Market Links
- Fieldwork and data analysis: Market Links, Sofia (opinion research centre)



Only one in eight Bulgarians thinks the media are free

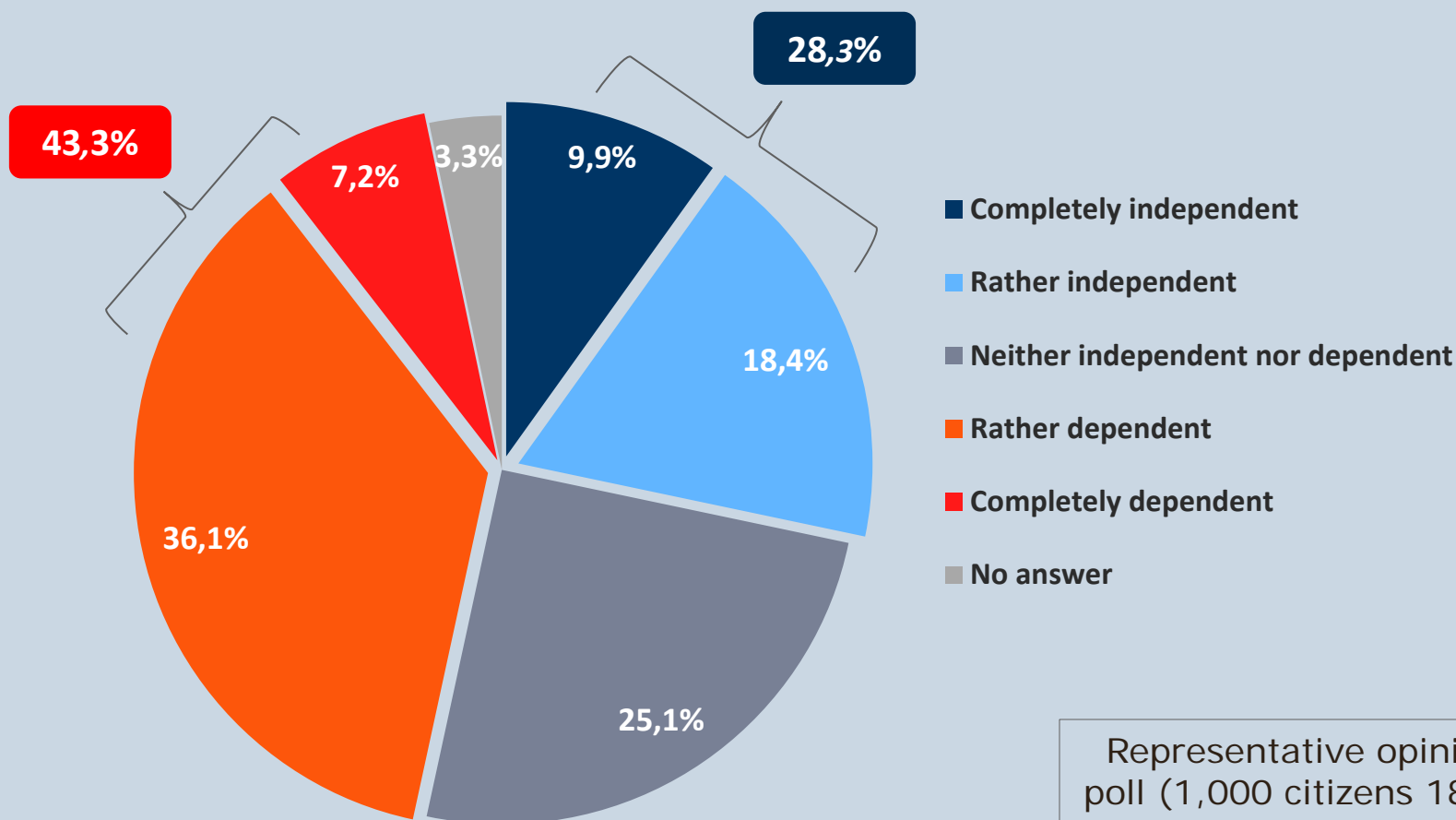
How dependent or independent are the media in the country?



Representative opinion poll (1,100 citizens 18+), December 2015, Bulgaria

Every fourth Romanian thinks the media are free

How dependent or independent are the media in the country?



Representative opinion
poll (1,000 citizens 18+),
December 2014, Romania

STUDY: PRESSURE ON MEDIA IN BULGARIA

- **Period of investigation:** January – September 2014
- **1st phase: Research** about **ownership** conditions and **revenues** of media
- **2nd phase: Interviews** with 100 **journalists** from 40 media outlets (national, regional; Print, Radio, TV, Online)
- **3rd phase: Interviews** with 17 **media owners** and media managers
- **Authors** of the study: Dr. Orlin Spassov (Sofia University) and Krum Blagov (“Reporter” foundation, BG)



KEY RESULTS (BULGARIA)

- 52 percent of journalists say that **politicians exert pressure** on their work.
- Every third bewails **pressure from media owners and advertisers**.
- **Internal censorship**: 30 percent of journalists state that in their media outlet, reporting about **certain topics, persons or companies** is not possible or only with a determined tendency.
- **Every fourth journalist** indicates that **texts** or other journalistic materials of his/hers **have been stopped**.
- Deficient **framework conditions**:
 - lack of press code (§) – no legal definition of relation journalist-management
 - collective labour agreements non-existent or not binding for most contracts
 - weak self-regulation
 - lack of solidarity and “spirit of change” within the profession

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE AUTHORS

- **Ownership** (in BG especially of printed media) has to become **more transparent** by law
- Political debate about **limitation** of **ownership concentration** in media sectors (TV, Print, ...)
- **Government** as biggest advertiser has to **disclose cash flows**
- **Obligation to label paid content** (text ads) in printed media
- **Equal access** of media outlets to **distribution** and to government information to be ensured



MORE APPROACHES FOR CHANGE

- **Influence on politicians** in transition countries during EU membership process (by EU institutions, governments, NGOs)
- **Schengen and EU subsidies** as a lever
- Advancement of **investigative journalism** (training, sponsorship, awards)
- **Further education**: Media ethics, EU topics
- Enhancement of **public debate**: media business, journalistic education, media law / self regulation
- Enhancement of both global **strategic communication** and **ethics in political PR**
- New **information platforms** for citizens



CONTACT

Christian Spahr

KAS Media Program South East Europe

Ul. Konrad Adenauer, Et. 1, Ap. 2
1504 Sofia
Phone: +359 2 94249-71

E-Mail: christian.spahr@kas.de
Web: www.kas.de/medien-europa
Facebook: www.facebook.com/kasmediaeurope
Twitter: @KASmediaSEE | @c_spahr

