

## **The election campaign in Bulgaria: Growing influence of the social media / Criticism at the one-sided political communication**

*A survey of the Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Social Research Agency "Alpha Research" about the role of the media in the parliamentary election campaign in 2021*

**More than half of the Bulgarians believe that they have been kept well-informed by the media during the parliamentary election campaign in April. Most voters have followed the news on TV. At the same time the influence of the social media and online news portals has been on the rise. The political communication of the parties is regarded as insufficient and incomprehensible. One in two respondents has criticised the one-sided communication by many politicians in the social media. These are the findings of a national survey assigned by the Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and carried out by Social Research Agency "Alpha Research".**

More than 50% of the Bulgarians are satisfied with the information they received from the media during the parliamentary election campaign. They believe to be well and very well-informed. In turn, about 30% of the respondents claimed that they would like to be better informed. Hardly 9% of the respondents said that the media influenced their voting decision in contrast to almost two-thirds (61%) who claimed that the information presented in the media did not make them change their decision.

Television has remained the most popular source of information during the election campaign. Private television stations have been preferred by about 59% of the respondents, followed by the national television preferred by 44%. The social media (33%) and online news portals (17%) come next. The print media have been the source of information for only 3% of the respondents. This is particularly indicative of the declining power of newspapers and magazines compared to the online media, which are the number one information source for young users in particular.

The coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing restrictions interfered with the organisation of public events and discussions, i.e. direct contact with the voters was missing. The latter situation contributed to the political communication taking place to a large extent in the media. However, the political parties did not avail themselves of this opportunity. Only one in third (approximately 35%) has been very or to a large extent satisfied with the communication of the politicians, while almost half of the respondents have criticised the information presented by the parties during the election campaign, what is more, the majority of the latter (27%) claim that the parties informed the public in a poor and incomprehensible manner.

The growingly one-sided communication of some politicians who ran their election campaign entirely in the social media has been also received with incomprehension. More than half of the respondents (56%) are convinced that it is only the traditional media that can succeed in playing the important role of an intermediary between the voters and the parties. Asking questions and comparing points of views is what reporters do. Almost 27% have even shared their concern that the predominant use of the social media can be dangerous because it promotes the spread of fake news, manipulation and compromising information.

“Democracy thrives in an environment of open competition and freely expressed opinions and arguments. That is why it is not beneficial when politicians disseminate one-sidedly their opinion via the social media”, Hendrik Sittig, Head of the Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung commented. “I’m glad, however that so many Bulgarians criticise this failure and thus recognise the importance of independent journalism.”

The findings were presented on 14<sup>th</sup> April by Boriana Dimitrova, Director of “Alpha Research” during an online discussion held by the Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Antoniy Galabov (a sociologist, a teacher at New Bulgarian University), Betina Joteva (Chairperson of the Council for Electronic Media) and Petar Karaboev (Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Dnevnik.bg*) took part in the discussion. Kristina Baxanova, Editor-in-Chief of International News on bTV chaired the event.

You can find the detailed results and charts of the survey on the [following link](#).

The Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is based in Sofia and follows the media situation in ten Balkan countries in total. The Programme supports with its projects the training of journalists and promotes media pluralism, enhanced media legislation as well as professional political communication. Media freedom and freedom of expression are the central pillars of democracy. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is a political foundation, aligned with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU). The organisation promotes liberal democracy, social market economy and the development and strengthening of consensus for freedom, justice and solidarity in Germany, Europe and across the world.

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