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forumZFD

Media Mapping and Dealing with the Past

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May 2023

forum ZFD Kosovo & North Macedonia

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Assessment Report

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May 2023

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Foreword: Dealing with the Past and the Media Landscape in the Western Balkans

The impact of the media on building narratives and influencing public opinion on topics surrounding Dealing with the Past cannot be understated. Especially in the context of dealing with the past, fact-based and multi-perspective approaches in journalism, coverage of past events, and reporting on the continued impacts of the violent conflicts of the 1990s and early 2000s is essential. Therefore, forumZFD Kosovo considers independent and pluralistic media and journalists as crucial actors to support an inclusive and peaceful development in the Western Balkans and regards Dealing with the Past as a key cross-cutting topic in these societies.

Nevertheless, forumZFD acknowledges that in the context of (post-)conflict situations, media and journalists face challenges while covering conflicts and their societal impact and trauma. They struggle to adjust a critical view on dealing with the past and transitional justice topics. Hence, the objective of mapping these actors is to sketch out the manifold connections and relevant areas between media outlets, journalists, and the challenging area of Dealing with the Past. We seek to throw light upon the crucial role that these platforms play in the context of coping with past conflicts in Kosovo and North Macedonia by providing an initial overview on the status-quo of the media landscape in the respective countries.

forumZFD Kosovo wants to thank the Association of Kosovo Journalists (AGK) and the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AGM) for preparing this research and the report. Special thanks go to Getoarbë Mulliqi-Bojaj, Abit Hoxha and Milan Spirovski. We also want to thank all the media outlets, journalists, and individuals who took part in the focus groups and interviews thus supporting this project in many ways.

For the forumZFD Office in Kosovo
Vjollca Islami-Hajrullahu, Alexander Vojvoda

About the Project

“Media Mapping in Kosovo and North Macedonia” is a project that will serve both policymakers and the journalistic community to identify conflict sensitive journalism patterns and possibilities to develop further opportunities for better reporting on dealing with the past. News beat of dealing with the past includes conflict reporting, inter-ethnic reporting, post-conflict reporting, court reporting of conflict and war-related causes, as well as other transitional justice coverage such as rape as a weapon of war, reparations, and institutional reforms.

To tackle the challenges ahead, a better understanding of the media landscape is needed, namely, to understand the state of media from the structural point of view and the perception of journalists on their own profession. This media landscape includes a media typology where the structure of media is seen from the perspective of coverage such as national, regional, and local media, as well as from the agenda setting perspective – looking at the salience of content that media produces from expert perspective. Furthermore, this media landscape also includes perceptions of journalists about dealing with the past and their role in the society and processes concerning the newsbeats that relate in diverse ways to past events, which extend into today’s public narratives.

Despite their differences, both Kosovo and North Macedonia have shared challenges with regards to reporting about the past. Problems with violence and trust building in the communities is a field of reporting that does not often go beyond borders of ethnicity and political landscape. Reaching across the ethnic lines and political division, puts journalists in a dichotomous role between reporting on own community and revealing the truth which jeopardizes the true nature of journalism and the use of objective methodology in choosing sources.

This media landscape report for Kosovo and North Macedonia also includes an overview of the self-perception of role of journalists in the society as it pertains to dealing with the past. Journalists stand in the center of journalistic concepts of professional ideology of independence, neutral reporting, and eye-witness accounting in one hand and their duty to accompany nation building processes, deal with crimes, scrutinize former officials of prior political structure and keep current political leaders accountable. This puts journalists in a particular position of being public defenders of the state, nation, and society building but also of development in post-conflict which is part of a wider political agenda. Hence, media actors are almost exclusively part of the political landscape. They argue that media and politics go hand in hand, both in Kosovo and North Macedonia. This, in itself, is challenging. Such interdependence of politics and media make is difficult for media to keep political actors accountable and jeopardizes the role of media in society.

The media landscape in Kosovo and North Macedonia incorporates both expert views and empirical research findings that can help structural interventions to continue enhancing the professionalism of journalists with regards to making ethical choices in reporting on dealing with the past. It also guides them to care more about sensitive cases where privacy, the rights of families and victims, and their dignity take the spotlight while leaving sensationalist and *celebritization* of news reporting for other news beats. Arguing for a bottom-up and conflict-sensitive reporting in dealing with the past, Kosovo and North Macedonian journalists will build themselves pathways of dealing with the past through content that cares about the about truth and dignity while respecting human rights and the rights of victims of conflicts. This enables peace and reconciliation among communities serving the general interests of the people first.

About the authors

Getoarbë Mulliqi-Bojaj is the Executive Director of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo and a researcher. She researches journalists, media and culture and focuses on journalistic professionalization and safety. She is the author of “Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists’ Safety in Kosovo” for the fourth year in a row.

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Milan Spirovski, Project Researcher at the Association of Journalists of Macedonia has over ten years of experience in implementation, logistics, and project support. Author of more than five annual reports on media freedom and journalists’ safety produced in the past several years.

Methodology

The methodology for the “Media Mapping in North Macedonia and Kosovo” triangulates the expertise of the authors, desk research, and empirical research in forms of interviews. Firstly, the expertise encompasses several decades of combined work experience of the team. From research expertise in North Macedonia to policy, research, and academic research in Kosovo, the expertise provides insights in the media systems. A semi-structured interview with journalists was designed, for the purpose of empirical research. It provided a narrative to confront interviewees with factual situations instead of generic questions to describe situations.

As generic questions produce generic answers loaded with professional ideology, namely, most respondents answer what researchers expect to hear from them and what answers do not fall under scrutiny of critical review, confronting respondents with factual evidence generated from desk research provides new findings on the perception of roles of journalists in dealing with the past.

The media sector in Kosovo and North Macedonia is small and therefore seldom, sampling for empirical research is nearly impossible due to many factors including the fact that most journalists know one another and the researchers too. Therefore, a special strategy was applied to recruit respondents for this document. A purposive sample strategy identified journalists to represent media from the national, regional, local landscapes as well as mainstream and alternative media that report on dealing with the past. This purposive sample was possible in a snowball form of researchers interviewing respondents who expanded the reach of respondents through their network bringing in views necessary for the empirical part of the research.

The analysis strategy also follows similar patterns of this triangulation. The expertise conducted an analysis of

the current state of affairs in the media system. The aim was to describe the number and spread of media within the landscape. This analysis provided the foundation for the interviews, which were analyzed through a thematic analysis approach summarizing and distilling answers in horizontal lines to generalize conclusions. This enabled to contrast and compare themes and findings in the national, regional, and local level but also come to concluding remarks that flush out similarities and differences between Kosovo and North Macedonia to enable a systematic intervention in support of improvements for sensitive reporting capacity development and advancing professionalization of journalists while saving journalistic values such as independence, neutrality, and truthful reporting in one hand and taking care of victims, respecting human rights and applying the principle of “do no harm” in overall narrative.

Overall, the findings and conclusions of the media landscape exercise bring in joint challenges and opportunities that media have in both Kosovo and North Macedonia. Challenges pertaining to conflict division and conflict reporting, inter-ethnic reporting, post-conflict reporting, court reporting of causes related to conflict and war, and how should these challenges be presented as opportunity to improve reporting and thus also advance professionalization of journalists based on a combination of expertise, existing policy and research with empirical findings from journalists themselves into factual recommendations for improvement.

Research Aim

The primary aim of this research is twofold: to generate knowledge on media outlets that cover dealing with the past for the purpose of collaboration and identify gaps in knowledge of covering dealing with the past for journalists to help enhance their continued professionalization. The research also explores the importance of conflict-sensitive journalism in the media and the need for media outlets to cater to all communities in the respective countries by providing news in their respective languages.

Research Objectives:

- 1 To investigate the concept of Conflict-Sensitive Journalism and its relevance to media practices in Kosovo and North Macedonia.
- 2 To identify media outlets with specialized units for covering topics related to dealing with the past.
- 3 To determine the extent to which media outlets in Kosovo and North Macedonia cater to all communities by providing news in their native languages.
- 4 To explore the challenges of integrating a conflict-sensitive perspective into everyday media practice.
- 5 To provide recommendations on how media outlets in Kosovo and North Macedonia can improve their conflict-sensitive reporting.

Research Design:

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach comprising both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. The data was gathered utilizing the following methods:

- In-depth interviews with media representatives from Kosovo.
- One focus group discussion with journalists previously trained by ForumZFD Kosovo and North Macedonia and Association of Journalists of Kosovo.
- In-depth interviews with media representatives from North Macedonia.
- Desk research related to articles published in media outlets in both Kosovo and North Macedonia.

Introduction

Kosovo and North Macedonia have their contextual similarities and shared history in former Yugoslavia despite these histories being different from each-other. North Macedonia enjoyed the status of a republic in former Yugoslavia whereas Kosovo was an autonomous province, thus producing different media landscapes. After the dismantling of Yugoslavia and the secession of North Macedonia from Yugoslavia, Kosovo remained under Serbia until 1999. Both North Macedonia and Kosovo have a shared post-conflict history with ethnic violence and human rights abuses and now face similar challenges in dealing with the past. Among the factors determining the media landscape in each of the two countries are the historical contexts, the social, political, and economic factors but also different international interventions. In North Macedonia for example, the international intervention was manifested in the form of an international support and humanitarian aid whereas in Kosovo, the international intervention was quiet literal and thus resetting the system completely. So, overall, Kosovo and North Macedonia have different

media landscapes, with similar challenges which makes the comparison work through comparing and contrasting the above factors.

Kosovo's media landscape has been shaped by its recent history, including its struggle for independence and state-building. During the period of struggle, media served as an identity-builder thus co-existing with the political system with the same political aim. This created a new kind of journalism that advocated for freedom, liberation of the country, patriotism and overall, seeking a state-building process whereby they perceived their role to help state institutions that were organizing the parallel life in Kosovo. Nowadays, the journalistic culture is leaning with new roles for journalists. Despite this, the media in Kosovo is generally free and independent, with several different media outlets covering a broad range of topics. However, there are concerns about press freedom and media pluralism in the country, particularly around issues such as ownership concentration and political influence.



After the dismantling of Yugoslavia and the secession of North Macedonia from Yugoslavia, Kosovo remained under Serbia until 1999. Both North Macedonia and Kosovo have a shared post-conflict history with ethnic violence and human rights abuses and now face similar challenges in dealing with the past.



In contrast, North Macedonia's media landscape is characterized by a more established media industry, with a longer history of journalism after the international aid to build a pluralist media system in the post-independence period. The media in North Macedonia transformed from state-controlled media under former Yugoslavia into a more pluralist and democratic media after the early nineties. Another deep reform of the media system took place after the conflict in early 2000s when the media system in North Macedonia transformed into a more multi-lingual and multi-cultural landscape. The media in North Macedonia is also generally free and diverse, although recently there have been concerns about media concentration and political influence.

Both Kosovo and North Macedonia face similar challenges related to media sustainability, technology change, and the need for high-quality journalism. However, the specific issues and dynamics of each country's media landscape are shaped by their unique histories, political contexts, and economic conditions.

Some of the key principles of conflict-sensitive journalism include:

- Accuracy and balance - ensuring that the reporting is fair, accurate and reflects different perspectives with special focus on the coverage of underrepresented groups and views in society.
- Sensitivity - avoiding language or actions that could be seen as inflammatory or disrespectful to different communities.
- Independence - avoiding political or other pressures that could compromise the integrity of reporting.
- Community engagement - engaging with different communities and seeking feedback on reporting to ensure it is accurate and effective.
- Journalist as an active part of the (post)conflict environment and dynamics; not a neutral observer.

Reporting on dealing with the past in Kosovo and North Macedonia can play a significant role in promoting truth, justice, and reconciliation. However, challenges remain in both countries. Overall, reporting on dealing with the past in Kosovo and North Macedonia has been instrumental in promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation between communities co-habiting in both countries, despite challenges and obstacles that remain.

Media landscape in Kosovo

Based on the coverage, Kosovo's media landscape consists of two levels: the national media and the regional media. By regional in Kosovo it is generally meant within country regions that have local media outlets that broadcast in several municipalities. However, these media outlets are not national, as through the distribution via cable services, they are defacto becoming national media. Kosovo has 19 licensed television stations, of which five (5) provide television broadcast services in the Serbian language. On the other hand, there are 89 radio stations, of which 22 broadcast in Serbian, three (3) in Bosnian, two (2) in Gorani, and one (1) in Turkish. Moreover, during the last couple of years new televisions have been opened.

Media outlets in Kosovo are regulated by two bodies: the self-regulatory body, the Press Council of Kosovo (PCK), which is in charge of regulating online media, considering that since March 2020 there is no printed media in Kosovo, and the regulatory body, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) which is responsible for regulating the audio-visual media in Kosovo. It is an independent and impartial authority that ensures media pluralism, diversity, and the respect of ethical and professional standards. The IMC is mandated by law to issue licenses, monitor media activities, and hear complaints from citizens or media outlets.

Kosovo's media function in a particular political context. Divided along ethnic lines, due to language barriers and inter-ethnic divide, Kosovo has a pluralistic and vivid media market¹. Audio-visual media are mostly concentrated in the capital, Prishtina, where also the public broadcaster (RTK) is located. Regional and local media are slightly less developed due to small market and dominance by the national agenda setting media. According to RSF (2023), RTK plays a key role in agenda setting. Kosovo also has some inter-ethnic media outlets.

Despite this, there are challenges when it comes to particular news beat reporting in issues such as corruption, inter-ethnic violence, and sometimes dealing with the past. Although in 2023, only 6 cases of violence against journalists were reported, journalists face many other challenges that impede their work. The cases of online harassment, inflammatory language, and violence against journalists is increasing despite Kosovo scoring best in the region when it comes to Freedom of Press. Violence against journalists is enhanced also in reporting on issues pertaining to the region of Northern Kosovo. Most Kosovo Albanian journalists have difficulties to access the northern part of Kosovo, which is predominantly populated by Serbs, and are not welcomed to report on unrelated issues to conflict.

The media landscape in Kosovo has been successfully maintaining a particular model that is arguably functioning well. History, international intervention, and aid provided to the media in a post-war setting, international correspondents' experience of collaborating with local journalists has influenced content production in Kosovo. In combination with the highest Internet penetration in the region, Kosovo's media landscape is a success on its own. A part of this success is also due to the digital infrastructure with high Internet penetration at 96.6% with about 1.6 million Internet users in Kosovo. In January 2023, Kosovo had 932.0 thousand social media users, which makes up for 56.1% of the total population. A total of 1.92 million cellular mobile connections were active in Kosovo in early 2023, with this figure equivalent to 115.5 percent of the total population. The above data also explains the mushrooming of new digital media and platformization of media in digital formats and social networks. The end of printed newspapers was received with a heavy heart by only a small number of subscribers and print media has completely turned into digital publishing.

¹ <https://rsf.org/en/country-kosovo>

The social network sector is advanced in Kosovo. Media follow digital platformization and use social networks for outreaching target audiences. Kosovo has 58.4% of eligible population (13+) using Facebook while Instagram is second most popular social media with 32.8% of eligible population as users. LinkedIn and Twitter are less popular with 98 thousand and 109.3 thousand users in 2023². Kosovo ranks well among all international organizations in terms of freedom of expression and media freedom with minor exclusions of censorship, self-censorship, working conditions and safety issues.

Media landscape in Kosovo is perceived as being highly pluralistic, both in terms of information and ideologies. News values are the criteria that journalists and news organizations use to evaluate the newsworthiness of a particular event or story. Some of the most common news values are proximity, impact, timeliness, conflict, and human interest.

In Kosovo, Conflict-Sensitive Journalism (CSJ) has been used as an approach to reporting on conflict that seeks to reduce tensions and avoid perpetuating violence. It involves a conscious effort by journalists to understand the complex dynamics of the conflict and to report on it in a way that is balanced, accurate, and fair to all sides involved. The goal of CSJ has been to include a multitude of underrepresented and diverse voices into the mainstream of news and media productions that by default promote peace and reconciliation by providing reliable information to the public.

Due to the fact that Kosovo provides a very pluralistic environment, in general, media cover a wide range of politics, economics, conflict sensitive journalism, justice, sports, entertainment, and culture. As generally assessed, the coverage of these news outlets

is mainly focused on local events and issues, as well as international news with particular emphasis on the region, Europe, as well as the United States.

It is perceived that topics related to politics are the most trending in media in Kosovo. However, media outlets have diverse interests, that is why including a broad range of topics ensures the aimed public attention on daily basis. Observation of television programs indicate that content related to politics is the easiest produced and therefore, political debates are the most sought-after media productions. Given Kosovo's recent history, media coverage often includes topics related to the country's independence, state-building, governance, and topics related to the past.

Dealing with the past is a critical issue for Kosovo, particularly in the context of the war and conflict that took place in the late 1990s. Journalism has played an important role in documenting and reporting on the events of that period, as well as in promoting dialogue and reconciliation among different communities in Kosovo.

Dealing with the past journalism in Kosovo has focused on several different issues, including war crimes, human rights violations, reparations, and the need for truth and reconciliation. Many journalists in Kosovo have worked to uncover the truth about what happened during the conflict, often at great personal risk. Some have faced threats and harassment, particularly when reporting on sensitive issues or when challenging powerful individuals or groups.

There have been initiatives to support the development of journalism in Kosovo, such as to promote media freedom, pluralism, and independent reporting. These include training programs for journalists, advocacy

² <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-kosovo>

campaigns, and the establishment of media monitoring mechanisms. These efforts have helped to create a more vibrant and diverse media landscape in Kosovo,

although there are still challenges to overcome in terms of ensuring full press freedom and the sustainability of independent media outlets.

Kosovo	
Broadcast	RTK, KTV, RTV 21, T7, Klan Kosova, Radios (Paper, Prishtina, Kosova, Glam)
Web based media	Telegrafi, Nacionale, Lajmi.net, Indeksonline, Gazeta Express, Front Online, Kossev, Paparaci, Reporteri Insajderi, Shqip.com, Blic, Inlajmi, Gracanica Online
New media	Kanal10, TEVE1, ATV
Local media	TV Mitrovica, TV Syri, TV Fontana, TV Festina TV Most, BIRN
NGO media	Kosovo2.0 CrnoI Belisvet Portal Sever

Journalists' perceptions with regards to Conflict Sensitive Journalism in Kosovo

Most journalists are aware of the type of reporting on the conflict, dealing with the past, and issues pertaining to news beats that deal with history, political negotiations, and inter-ethnic reporting. Kosovo journalists have received trainings from many international organizations and these trainings have had an impact at least on the level of understanding conflict-related news and media productions and increased awareness. "We have received extensive training from international organizations such as by forum ZFD in Kosovo, to increase our understanding of conflict-related productions."

Journalists emphasize the need to navigate the psychological challenges of covering traumatic events while seeking to uphold ethical reporting standards and avoid sensationalism. According to the interviewees, despite the challenges that may come when reporting on conflict-sensitive journalism related topics, "Reporting on conflict-sensitive journalism related topics is crucial for promoting peace and reconciliation in societies such as the Kosovan one." Journalists claim that they do their utmost to report objectively, maintain the balance and be accurate in their reporting, as well as avoid making judgments. According to the journalists' perceptions, conflict-sensitive journalism aims to promote dialogue and understanding and foster greater trust and confidence in media among communities torn apart by violence. They mainly refer to the practice of

covering conflicts in a way that does not exacerbate or perpetuate violence or other negative consequences. This may involve taking steps to avoid sensationalism, carefully considering the implications of the stories being covered, and ensuring that all sides of the conflict are represented fairly.

Generally, journalists understand the importance of reporting on conflict-sensitive topics and the impact their reporting can have on a situation. Furthermore, they understand the ethical responsibility they have to report accurately and truthfully, without fanning the flames or exacerbating tensions.

However, occasionally reporting on conflict-sensitive topics can be challenging and emotionally taxing as it involves dealing with sensitive and often traumatic material, navigating ethical dilemmas, and maintaining objectivity while communicating the complexity of the conflict to the public. Most of the journalists claim that “We understand the importance of reporting on conflict-sensitive topics and the impact our reporting can have on peacebuilding. Reporting on conflict-sensitive topics can be challenging and emotionally taxing for us too.” Despite these challenges, many journalists view conflict reporting as a critical aspect of their profession and aim to provide nuanced and comprehensive coverage of these topics.

Journalists and media representatives claim that it is widely recognized that post-conflict audiences may not always be prepared emotionally for topics relating to dealing with the past, as they can evoke painful memories and traumatic experiences. One of the interviewees specifically claimed that “post-conflict audiences may not always be prepared emotionally for topics relating to dealing with the past, and media outlets have to be more sensitive in their approach.” Having stated that, media outlets should be way more sensitive in their approach and provide warnings or trigger warnings when necessary.

Conflict Sensitive Journalism and media mapping in the Kosovo context

Conflict-sensitive journalism in Kosovo requires media outlets to cover events and topics in a way that does not inflame already existing tensions between different ethnic groups. According to the interviewees, journalists in Kosovo provide “balanced and impartial coverage, focusing on facts and in general are not sensationalizing news related to CSJ in order to appeal to its audiences or even to perpetuate stereotypes.”

“We provide balanced and impartial coverage, focusing on facts and in general are not sensationalizing news related to CSJ in order to appeal to our audiences or even to perpetuate stereotypes,” some claim. It has been assessed that journalists also exercise caution when reporting on sensitive issues such as war crimes or ethnic conflict to avoid inciting violence or hatred.

To some extent, media professionals in Kosovo acquire knowledge of the historical, political, and social context in which they are reporting. They tend to understand the various ethnic groups, their beliefs, and their aspirations to have a clear understanding of the situation on the ground. Understanding the power dynamics in Kosovo, including political affiliations, also helps journalists report more accurately and objectively.

One good practice for conflict-sensitive journalism in Kosovo is media mapping, which involves identifying the various media outlets and monitoring their coverage of different events. Such mapping helps identify any biases that may exist in the media and provides insights into how to improve the coverage for a more impartial and balanced representation.

Another good practice is to promote dialogue to build bridges between different ethnic groups, especially in

those areas where tensions are high. The majority of the respondents see the journalists play a role in facilitating dialogue between different ethnic groups and promoting constructive discussion. “We play a vital role in facilitating this conversation by providing a platform for different voices to be heard and by promoting constructive discussion.”

Lastly, media professionals claim to have established ethical standards and work towards complying with them. They are focused on reporting the truth, avoiding sensationalism and/or propaganda and showing respect for all individuals and groups affected by their reporting.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about agenda-setting media, which tend to “blossom” in specific times, such as: elections and dialogue sessions between Kosovo and Serbia. Those media outlets that perform entirely online and are established prior to these events taking place, have as their mission to contribute to the opposite of what professional media do. Besides their reporting, professional journalists and media are burdened with combating the disinformation spread by malicious groups of interest. Through conflict-sensitive journalism, the media are promoting peace, as well as contributing to building a more just, equitable, and tolerant society in Kosovo.

Audiences in Kosovo and Conflict Sensitive Journalism

The audience in Kosovo is diverse, with different communities and interests. The majority of the population is ethnic Albanian, with smaller communities of Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks, Turks, Gorani, Ashkali and Egyptian. The media in Kosovo has a crucial role in informing and engaging this diverse audience, promoting dialogue, and fostering understanding among different communities.

Conflict-sensitive journalism is an important approach in Kosovo, given the country’s recent history of war and conflict and the ongoing challenges related to inter-community relations. Conflict-sensitive journalism aims to report on sensitive issues in a way that does not inflame tensions but rather promotes diverse sources and representation of sides. This approach involves understanding the context, being aware of potential sources of conflict, and avoiding language and framing that could be seen as inflammatory or divisive.

By adopting a conflict-sensitive approach, the media in Kosovo have contributed to widen the pool of sources so it represents more views that are traditionally underrepresented. In conclusion, the media has played a vital role in the peace-building process in Kosovo. It has facilitated access to information, enabled dialogue, fostered social cohesion, developed reconciliation mechanisms, and created a culture of peace. By promoting open and inclusive platforms for dialogue, the media has been instrumental in creating possibilities for long-term sustainable peace in Kosovo, making it essential in conflict prevention and the establishment of peace.

Audiences in North Macedonia and Conflict Sensitive Journalism

Journalists claim that working for the Public Service Broadcaster means that quality comes always before quantity, and that they do not practice sensational journalism to get more views and/or clicks, in the contrary, they comply with code of conduct in order to remain trustworthy. Their audience mainly consists of the elderly, as Television remains the most reliable source of information for them. Nonetheless, agenda setting media, as well as the traditional media that publish sensational headlines and/or articles tend to cause problems, because the generation that gets

informed mainly in social media click those “news,” rather than a thoroughly done research. There are no media that in particular or purposely refrain from practicing journalism that deals with the past. The only reason seems to be lack of time to conduct proper research.

They (journalists) wish to be capable of practicing conflict-sensitive journalism, however according to their internal assessments it seems that their audience is not drawn to this kind of publishing / topics / news. Their regulars are mainly interested in getting informed about current affairs and on-going events.

The trust of the audience towards media and journalists is still extremely poor, giving the political parties the possibility to easily manipulate the citizens by setting the media discourse in directions often not in line with the public interest. In 2023 in a period of only a month, harsh public humiliations/labelling by politicians and holders of public functions took place that was also condemned by the European Federation of Journalists.



We provide balanced and impartial coverage, focusing on facts and in general are not sensationalizing news related to CSJ in order to appeal to our audiences or even to perpetuate stereotypes.



Media landscape in North Macedonia

The media landscape in North Macedonia is diverse and dynamic, with print, broadcast, and online media playing important roles. However, the media sector in the country faces significant challenges such as political interference, declining revenues, and in some media biased reporting can be noticed. To overcome these challenges, the media sector in North Macedonia needs to adopt professional standards, promote transparency, and ensure editorial independence. With the right policies and regulations, the media sector in North Macedonia has the potential to become a vibrant and influential force in the country's democratic development.

The most recent EU country report notes certain improvements in the climate for media freedom and this too is noted within the last global index of the Reporters Without Borders³ whereas North Macedonia for 2019 is ranked as 95 compared to 108 in the previous year. In 2022, according to the global index, North Macedonia progressed by 33 places, i.e., from the 90th to the 57th place. However, other international ratings such as the Freedom Barometer⁴ show that the situation still needs to be closely monitored and the Freedom House still rates NM as partly free⁵. The 2018 report in “Indicators on the Level of Media Freedoms and Journalists’ Safety in the Western Balkans” also confirms a positive but challenged environment.⁶ The laws in the country formally guarantee the freedom of journalistic work and amendments of the Criminal Code for more systematic protection of journalists were adopted, but there is no judicial practice given that the legal interventions took place at the beginning of 2023 hence the situation needs to be monitored. Journalists still have difficulties in their work, not only in terms of information and social standards but also

in their safety while performing their professional duties.

Broadcast media is the most popular form of media in North Macedonia. The country has several public and private television and radio stations. The public broadcaster, Macedonian Radio and Television (MRT) is the largest media organization in the country. MRT operates several television and radio channels, including a satellite channel that broadcasts internationally. Apart from MRT, there are 13 national private television stations (terrestrial and satellite/cable) and radio stations that operate in the country. In addition, The Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM) and Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) established a Register of Professional online Media, which, as of this year, comprises 154 online news media, including non-profit ones. Most of these media have accepted or complied with the Code of Ethics and the Guidelines for Ethical Reporting in online Media, whose implementation is ensured by CMEM.

³ See Index of RSF for 2019 <https://rsf.org/en/republic-north-macedonia>

⁴ See <http://freedombarometer.org/country/north-macedonia/197/2018/>. “...Democratic transition of the government in Macedonia paved the way for more positive developments in media, although it is still to be seen how effective the new government will be on this.”

⁵ See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/north-macedonia>. North Macedonia scores 2 on the question whether the media is free and independent. The lowest score is 0 for worst and the highest is 4 for best.

⁶ See “Indicators on the Level of Media Freedoms and Journalists’ Safety in the Western Balkans – Comparative Analysis 2018” published by Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia, December 2018 with the financial assistance of the European Union and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

North Macedonia

Broadcast	MRT (PBS) National terrestrial: Kanal 5 TV, Alfa TV, TELMA TV, SITEL TV, ALSAT M TV National cable / satellite: 24 TV, TV 21, TV Klan, TV Shenja, Nasa TV All others available at https://avmu.mk/radiodifuzeri-mk
Web based media	All professional online media, members of the Council of Ethics can be found here www.promedia.mk
New media	n/a
Local media	Kanal Festa TRD TV PLUS DOO Kumanovo TV NEWS Kumanovo TVK DOOEL Kochani TV KANAL 8 DOOEL Kochani PROTEL TV ZDRAVKIN TTV SVET DOO Sveti Nikole TV Kaltrina SPEKTRA DIBRA TV DOOEL Debar TV GURRA TELEVIZIJA USKANA KICHEVO TV DUE TRD G-TV TELEVIZIJA GEVGELIJA
NGO media	BIRN Prizma.mk radioMof.mk IRL.mk Goce.mk

Journalists are familiar with the concept of Conflict-Sensitive Reporting, however due to its high sensitivity they claim to not cover topics related to it regularly - generally speaking. Furthermore, it is perceived that in general they refrain from making statements that could cause potential conflicts. This could be due to lack of proper expertise on covering topics related to Conflict-Sensitive Reporting. Media in North Macedonia do not

apply the Conflict-Sensitive Reporting approach. NGOs and activists mainly address this approach. It lacks proper attention but also a professional approach to employ such perspectives.

Conflict sensitive journalism is a concept that has gained attention in recent years, particularly in regions where historical and contextual complexities create

challenges for media reporting. In countries like North Macedonia, where conflict-sensitive journalism has not been widely adopted, the lack of knowledge and understanding of this concept can be attributed to its relative invisibility in the media landscape.

The need for conflict-sensitive journalism in North Macedonia is evident, as it can provide the public with a balanced and informed perspective on various issues. However, implementing this approach requires considerable time and efforts to ensure that the concept is well understood and applied effectively.

Sensationalism and audience targeting remain significant challenges that can hinder the development of conflict-sensitive journalism in the country. In North Macedonia, the media plays a crucial role in shaping societal narratives, and neglecting to cover certain topics can have far-reaching consequences.

A lack of critical and analytical thinking among the public further exacerbates these issues, as it allows for the dissemination of misleading information and contributes to the polarization of society.

Conflict-sensitive journalism is essential in diversifying sources to represent views that are often suppressed or underrepresented in North Macedonia. By avoiding sensationalism and polarization, fostering dialogue, and understanding, adopting a constructive approach, upholding ethical standards, and collaborating with civil society and peacebuilding organizations, journalists widen the scope of sources and thus can contribute to building a more peaceful and democratic society. Journalists should seek out diverse perspectives and give voice to all sides of an issue. Additionally, they should focus on the root causes of conflicts and provide context to help readers or viewers understand the complexities of the issues at hand.



The media landscape in North Macedonia is diverse and dynamic, with print, broadcast, and online media playing important roles. However, the media sector in the country faces significant challenges such as political interference, declining revenues, and in some media biased reporting can be noticed. To overcome these challenges, the media sector in North Macedonia needs to adopt professional standards, promote transparency, and ensure editorial independence.



Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, the media landscape in Kosovo and North Macedonia is complex and diverse, with differences at the level of media freedom, regulation, and the challenges faced by journalists. Kosovo has a pluralistic media environment with a high degree of Internet penetration and a lively media market concentrated mostly in the capital. The country's media landscape has been influenced by its history, international interventions, and aid provided to the media in the post-war setting.

Conflict-sensitive journalism plays a significant role in Kosovo, providing a balanced and informed perspective on various issues, including those related to dealing with the past but division in ethnic lines exists also due to language barriers. New digital media and platforms have witnessed significant growth, and politics remains a popular topic in Kosovo media. The media sector in Kosovo has great potential for growth and change and should continue to adopt professional standards, promote transparency, ensure editorial independence and freedom of media.

In North Macedonia, the media sector is facing significant challenges, such as political interference, declining revenues, and biased reporting. The country's media landscape requires professional standards, transparency, and editorial independence. Conflict-sensitive journalism is essential for promoting peace and understanding in North Macedonia. In both countries, journalists understand the importance of covering sensitive topics objectively and avoiding sensationalism, but they face emotional and ethical challenges. Media outlets should ensure sensitivity in their approach and provide warnings when necessary.

Overall, there is a need to ensure press freedom and the sustainability of independent media outlets in countries, promoting transparency, and adopting professional standards. Further training programs and investing

in enhancing the professionalism of journalists with regards to dealing with the past will make a significant advancement of quality media content.

- Within the setting of Conflict Sensitive Journalism in both Kosovo and North Macedonia, activities can be useful in both local and national media. All media formats, including TV, radio, print, and online, can benefit from conflict-sensitive journalism practices.
- There are several activities that have been identified as effective in promoting responsible and accurate reporting about Dealing with the Past. These include capacity building programs that are designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of journalists and media organizations, the production of news content that is sensitive to conflicts and their dynamics, and the formalization of partnerships between NGOs and media outlets through the signing of Memorandums of Understanding. In Kosovo and North Macedonia, civil society organizations and grassroots movements have played a significant role in lobbying for media reforms.
- Kosovo and North Macedonia have diverse media landscape that includes a mix of public, private, and NGO media. This diversity fosters a wider range of viewpoints and encourages discussions on Conflict Sensitive Journalism. Media outlets in Kosovo and North Macedonia are continuously investing in professional development and training programs for their journalists – mainly with the help of international organizations which extend their activities in the respective countries. This has clearly improved the quality of reporting and made their news coverage more responsible, fair, and neutral. Journalists from different

media outlets have come together and launched joint editorial projects to address Conflict Sensitive Journalism. Celebritization and Sensationalization of journalism remain the biggest challenges for journalists as such approach are affecting news production within the newsrooms.

- It is essential to prioritize engagement with local and non-majority community media outlets that may present unique challenges and perspectives to contribute. The utilization of community media can be instrumental in promoting conflict-sensitive journalism, owing to their proximity to the local audiences and their capacity to offer more nuanced reportage on sensitive subjects.
- Training and capacity building: Provide regular training and workshops for journalists, editors, and media professionals on conflict-sensitive journalism, emphasizing ethical reporting, understanding the root causes of conflicts, and offering balanced perspectives.
- Encourage collaboration: Foster partnerships between media organizations, civil society, and peace-building organizations to promote dialogue, share information, and develop joint initiatives to advance conflict-sensitive journalism in North Macedonia.
- Strengthen media self-regulation: Support the development and implementation of effective self-regulation mechanisms within the media industry, such as the Press Council of Kosovo (PCK) and the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM), to uphold professional standards and address unethical reporting practices.
- Media literacy and critical thinking: Implement public awareness campaigns and educational programs to improve media literacy and promote critical thinking among the public, empowering them to recognize and reject sensationalism and misleading information.
- Diversify newsroom perspectives: Encourage the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives in newsrooms by actively recruiting and supporting journalists from different ethnic, religious, and gender backgrounds.
- Financial sustainability and independence: Advocate for policies that ensure the financial sustainability and independence of media, enabling them to resist political interference and maintain editorial independence. This may include transparent public funding mechanisms, support for independent media outlets, and the promotion of innovative business models for media organizations.

