

‘A Sleeping Mechanism’ for the time being?

Media accountability online in Bulgaria

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'A Sleeping Mechanism' for the time being? Media accountability online in Bulgaria

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Summary

This report summarizes the main tendencies related to the current discussions on self-regulation and media ethics in Bulgaria, in an era of social change and technological development. On the basis of available literature and the interviews conducted with Bulgarian media scholars, experts and practitioners in Sofia (November 2010) several trends have been observed. The paper deals with the cultural, social and political contexts, the level of journalistic professionalization, as well as the effectiveness and legitimacy of existing media accountability and transparency institutions. An in-depth analysis of the development of new media platforms and Internet users' culture helps to define some of most significant examples of external and internal practices, strategies and cases maintaining media accountability and transparency innovations in the online space. The research on the usage of social networks and blogs, as well as on practices fostering actor and production transparency and the level of media responsiveness underlines the current stage and future scenario of the evolution of system making Bulgarian media organizations accountable and transparent.

1. Context factors in the development of online media accountability practices

1.1 Social context. Towards an understanding of media accountability and transparency

Bulgaria has experienced a lengthy process of development over the last twenty two years. The transition from a communist state towards democracy had a huge impact on the introduction of freedom of speech and independent media organizations. In the early 1990s, Bulgaria jumped from the one extreme to another - from the total control of media by the Communist Party to the total freedom of democracy, in which people were able to write whatever they wanted without taking into consideration aspects of writing like copyright {Zlatev}¹. During the transition process, media were very progressive and played a significant role in stimulating the development of democracy {Raycheva}. No-one, during the process, was able to assume that media could be profitable, not only in monetary terms but also in influence.

However, over the past couple of years media in Bulgaria have started to lose their basic purpose of being the watchdogs of political power and being the voice of society. The lack of clear and stable regulation has resulted in a “complex relationship between the media and politicians and has opened the doors for frequent political interferences into media organizations” (Dobрева et al. 2011: forthcoming). As a result, Bulgarian media organizations started to develop in accordance to logic of both the market and political power rather than to professional standards of journalism {Raycheva}.

The discussion on media accountability (MA) and transparency in Bulgaria was launched by representatives of academia and was further developed by professionals, most notably the members of journalistic associations. The notions of MA and transparency have been mainly defined in the context of responsibility {Arnaudova} and as an indicator for the development of democratic society {Zankova}. The discussions on these notions have mainly been related to the traditional media organizations. However, the level of discourse on MA in particular has been declining and there have not been that many substantial and interesting discussions to date {Zankova}. Little attention is paid to media problems, such as ownership, performance and how the media are organizing their work {Raycheva}, which is similar to Anna Arnaudova's sentiment that:

“Quite a little, not to say anything, is being done on transparency and accountability of the media in Bulgaria”.

To this end, Bulgaria is in the early stages of introducing self-regulation of the Internet {Arnaudova; Zankova} and consequently, there are not sufficient online media accountability

¹ All the interviews were conducted in 2010 and are indicated by the names of interviewees in curly brackets, e.g. {Zlatev}

and transparency instruments and practices that could further help to underline some general tendencies {Raycheva}.

1.2 Media legitimacy and existing Media Accountability institutions

So far media organizations in Bulgaria have been successful in maintaining the high level of influence and public trust in comparison to other political and public institutions (Dobрева et al. 2011: forthcoming). A survey conducted by the sociological agency Alpha Research in April 2008 indicated the media were among the most trusted institutions, with around 76 per cent of the population declaring their trust in the media (Smilova et al. 2010: 11). Yet, some of the most recent developments indicate that “the level of credibility of the journalistic profession and of the so-called ‘fourth estate’ in the country has been undermined” (Smilova et al. 2010: 12). One of the reasons for this has been the lack of any role for the instruments of media accountability and transparency to play.

There are several recognizable MA and transparency instruments in the Bulgarian media system. For instance, the development of codes of journalistic ethics created by various social groups resulted in the adoption of the media code of ethics, drafted within the framework of the PHARE project “Technical Support for Improving the Professional Standards for Bulgarian Journalism”. The code was signed on 25 November 2004 by a number of groups and associations including: the Association of Bulgarian Broadcasters, the Bulgarian Media Coalition, the Union of Bulgarian Journalists, the Union of Publishers and the Association for Regional Media as well as 45 media outlets of newspapers, private broadcasters and public service media (IFJ 2005). The code underlines a range of ethical principles dealing with protection of minors, non-discrimination, and coverage of crimes as well as of cases of brutality, issues related to supplying the public with reliable information, presentation of information and maintaining editorial independence:

“For the first time we managed to have most of the media, and especially influential media united around one idea and understanding that we need some kind of framework that would put the benchmarks, the standards for certain level of professionalism”. {Zlatev}

The media’s code of ethics was introduced during an official ceremony with an active participation of the President of Bulgaria, the Speaker of Parliament, the Prime Minister and the representatives of media organizations.

In 2005, the National Council for Journalistic Ethics was created as a press council (PC) with two complaints commissions for press and broadcasting accordingly. The model adopted in Bulgaria was perhaps one of the most democratic when it comes to the members’ appointments {Zlatev}. Thus, the PC responded to the interests of all media stakeholders: the publishers, media

owners, journalists and public at large since an equal representation of all these groups occurs at each level of decision-making.

An impact of supranational EU regulations is the positive development of media system, since "as a whole, Bulgaria has copied successfully with the transposition of Community law – as of February 2008, it was ranked second among Member States with 99.7 per cent harmonization as 1720 Directives from a total of 1724 had been transposed" (Ognyanova, 2009: 27). Positive developments have also been observed in connection to the operations of Bulgarian National Radio (BNR), which has chosen to make a clear distinction between the structures relevant for administration and programming, the operation of the programming council as well as a certain level of transparency observed in the system of funding adopted by the BNR {Milanova; Radovanov}.

However despite the fact that the functioning of media has become more transparent, the development of media policy in Bulgaria is still facing problems related to the level of transparency {Raycheva}. An in-depth analysis of the existing MA institutions might reveal a distinction between theory and practice since little has been done to secure the implementation of standards for the journalistic profession.

The countries of Southern and Eastern Europe share some common features when implementing self-regulatory mechanisms to the sector of media. These features include:

- unclear and incomplete legislative framework;
- the lack of effectiveness in the process of implementation at the national level;
- the weak institutional capacities of professional media organizations and a low level of acceptance by certain stakeholders;
- the small impact of self-regulatory mechanisms on the media;
- the lack of independence from politics and the market;
- the lack of awareness by the public of the existence of regulatory mechanisms (Zlatev, 2011).

Negative assessments in the legislative framework have been observed in connection to media ownership. Despite the fact that with the support from the Union of Publishers the new bill on media ownership is currently being discussed, the incomplete and confusing legislation resulted in the emergence of media groups with unclear origins and financial opacity. For instance, the ownership of the New Bulgarian Media Group that owns both terrestrial and cable TV channels, daily newspapers, one weekly paper and several websites is not transparent and thus could not be defined {Antonova}. Furthermore, the New Bulgarian Media Group is among the 30-35 per cent media organizations that have not signed the code of ethics adopted in 2004 {Zankova}.

The code of journalistic conduct is relatively short and there is a lack of sanctions for the journalists who do not follow the code {Zankova; Antonova}. As a consequence the code

“[is] something that stays on paper but is not implemented in practice as it should be”.
{Arnaudova}

Finally, Bulgaria is among those countries that have not introduced an ombudsman relevant to the media sector. In addition, the processes of politicization in the Council for Electronic Media – regulatory authority responsible for the development of electronic media in Bulgaria – might have been observed (see Case 1).

Case 1: Съветът за електронни медии: the Council for Electronic Media (CEM)

The Council for Electronic Media in Bulgaria (CEM) is a regulatory authority established to supervise the development of both public service and commercial radio and TV channels.

Among the tasks of the CEM are:

- monitoring compliance with the statutory requirements towards advertising, sponsorship, copyright, protection of youth and minors,
- handling complaints from the citizens,
- election of the Directors-General of the Bulgarian National Radio and the Bulgarian National Television (Съветът за електронни медии, 2010).

As members of the CEM are elected by state authorities - the National Assembly and the President of the Republic of Bulgaria - political affiliations observed in the structure of CEM also occur in the election process of the Directors-General. This raises the issue of the level of independence, from politics, of public service media (EJC 2010).

For example elections recently took place for new Directors-General and the name of the new Director-General of the Bulgarian National Television was revealed by a newspaper before the elections took place {Zankova}.

Consequently, the performance of traditional media accountability institutions and their effectiveness on the new platforms and online space have also been questioned:

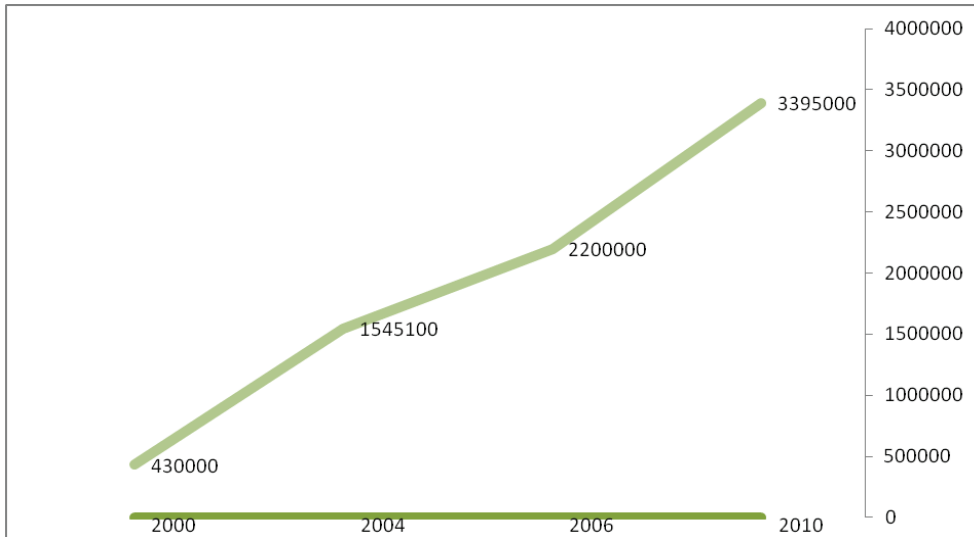
“I cannot say that we have, as the Press Council, that many cases, discussions, complaints about articles that appeared on Internet, but what I can say is that we decided that we should extend the realm of the code of ethics also to the Internet (...) Of course it's a matter of technology as well as practice, how to make the owners of the online media responsible for the content that is put there, especially in the forums or in the discussion platforms? Or how do you make the bloggers responsible?”
{Zlatev}

1.3 Internet users' cultures

Television remains the most popular medium in Bulgaria but the quality of TV programs has seriously declined in the last few years {Zankova; Zlatev}. The importance of the Internet has grown from 430,000 users (6 per cent penetration rate) in 2000 to 3,395,000 users (47.5 per

cent penetration rate) in 2010 (Internet World Stats, 2010) (see Figure 1). Among the most relevant features of online media development in Bulgaria in 2010 were the emergences of more professional websites, the rapid development of social networks and the increased usage of mobile Web {Elenkov}.

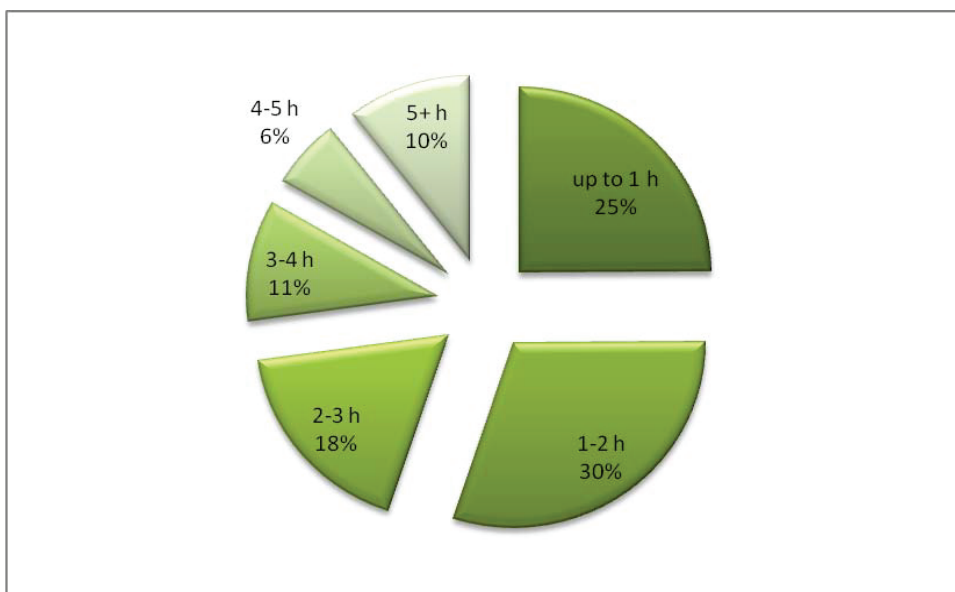
Figure 1: The number of Internet users in Bulgaria (2000-2010)



Source: Internet World Stats (2010).

Fairly recent data show that of the 46.5 per cent of Bulgarians who use the Internet daily, the most popular durations spent online are 1-2 hours (30.2 per cent) and 2-3 hours (18 per cent) (TNS TV Plan 2010) {Elenkov} (See Figure 2).

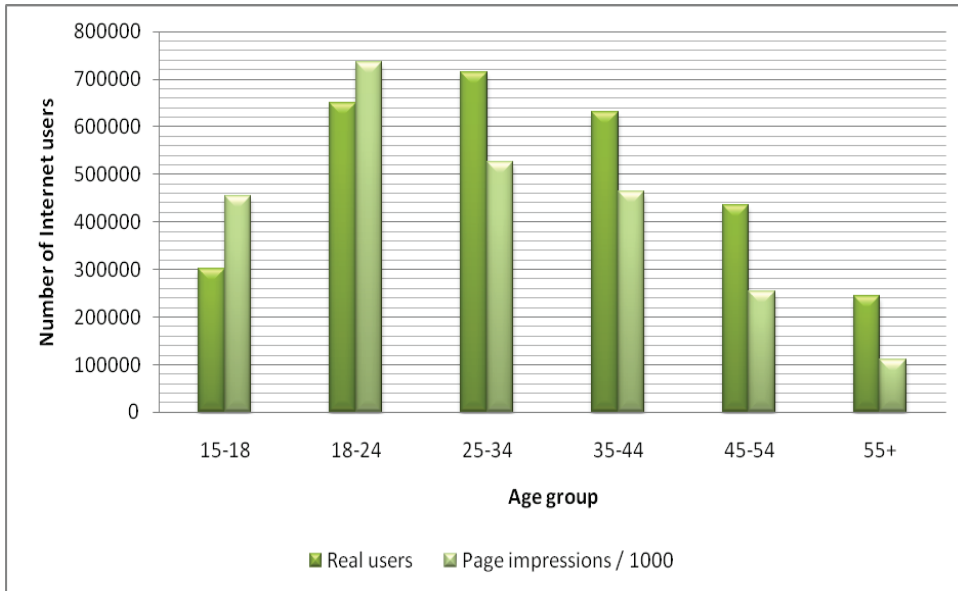
Figure 2: User time spent online



Source: TNS TV Plan (2010). {Elenkov}

The predominant users of the Internet are youths (18-24 years); young adults (25-34 years) and middle-age adults (35-44 years) who form approximately 61 per cent of the user population (Gemius 2010) {Elenkov} (See Figure 3).

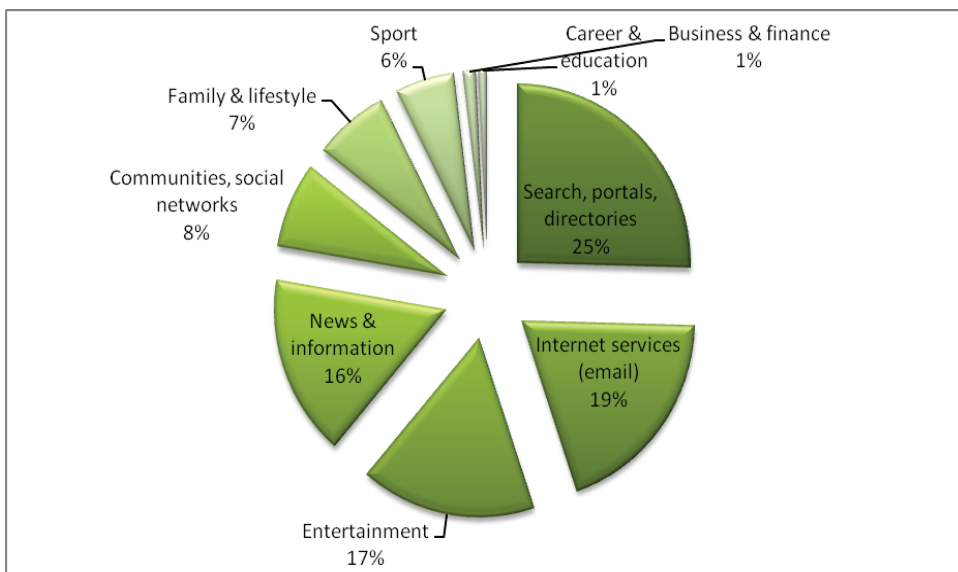
Figure 3: The usage of Internet by age groups



Source: Gemius (2010). {Elenkov}

The main purpose of using the Internet was usage of search portals and directories. To this end, e-mail services and entertainment, together with news/information and community/social networks were among the main purposes of the usage of Internet in Bulgaria (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Purpose of using the Internet



Source: Nielsen (2007). {Elenkov}

1.4 Professionalization of journalism and the developments in online news

Very few serious attempts have been made to examine the development of journalistic professionalization in Bulgaria. Yet, most of the existing studies have mainly emphasized the high level of media-political integration, the quality of journalistic culture as well as its historical development. For instance, one of the recent comparative research projects entitled "Political Communication in New Democracies" funded by the British Academy has not only investigated mutual relationships but also practices, norms and unwritten rules that are guiding the interactions between Bulgarian politicians and journalists:

"While Bulgarian journalists and politicians hold rather hostile and dismissive views of each other they are also involved in a close – apparently too close – network of relationships that at times threatens the integrity of journalistic independence". (Dobрева et al. 2011: forthcoming)

Generally, Bulgarian journalists prefer the patronage of both those in political power and business groups and thus the practice of 'paid news coverage' is still observed:

"Journalists seem to follow the old patterns from twenty years ago, where the news on the President or Prime Minister were seen as the most important. Still there is a possibility that somebody from the government can call the media and change the order of the news". {Antonova}

The development of online platforms has not helped to change this situation and possibly makes it even worse {Antonova}. The Press Freedom Index prepared by the Reporters Without Borders for the Press Freedom in 2010, listed Bulgaria alongside some other countries including Greece in the 70th place, which was the lowest ranking for EU member states (Press Freedom Index, 2010).

By contrast a recent research project on political communication in new democracies emphasizes that Bulgarian journalists "seem to be more aware of the dangers involved in the closed-shop culture of Bulgarian political communication. Their statements reflect a rather high level of self-reflection and the desire to adopt what they regard as more professional western standards of journalism" (Dobрева et al. 2011: forthcoming). Since 2000 Bulgaria has been a member of the South East European Network for Professionalisation of Media (SEENPM), a non-profit association created to strengthen the development of independent media as well as relations among journalists and overall progress in the region (SEENPM, 2010) (see Case 2).

Case 2: The South East European Network for Professionalisation of Media (SEENPM)

SEENPM consists of fifteen not-for-profit media centers from eleven South East European and neighboring countries united to provide a wide range of journalism training, exchange, and media policy research and advocacy projects.

Among the tasks of SEENPM are:

- strengthening the role of independent and pluralistic media and promoting transparency in the media industry,
- enhancing professional and ethical standards in journalism,
- sustaining and developing national and regional trainings for journalists and research projects connected to media,
- strengthening the cooperation between member centers and with similar institutions from other parts of the world.

Most recently, SEENPM has organized a training program in ethics for online media with the leadership of Media Center in Sarajevo, as well as national roundtable discussions on media self-regulation and the mechanisms on online ombudsman (SEENPM, 2010).

The most popular Bulgarian online service is e-mail provider Abv.bg, which offers news from the press agencies at the same time. Among the most popular is BG-mamma.com, a network designed for the young mothers {Elenkov} (see Table 1). The national statistics do not include the operations of foreign-owned media and social networks such as Facebook – the most popular online service in Bulgaria in 2010 with 1.98 million users (www.socialbakers.com).

Table 1: The most popular Bulgarian owned online media services (%)

No	Site/brand	Owner	Daily unique browsers	Monthly reach
1	Abv.bg	Netinfo	510,015	54.49
2	Vbox7.com HP	Netinfo	301,738	30.87
3	Netinfo	Netinfo	181,926	24
4	Gbg.bg	Netinfo	136,875	20.72
5	Dnes.bg	Investor	86,195	13.06
6	Aha.bg (HP & PP)	Investor	78,242	9
7	BG-mamma.com	NEG	61,903	13.09
8	Mail.bg	Mail.bg	58,233	7.78
9	Start.bg	Investor	57,065	13.39
10	Gong.bg	Darik Web	47,399	5.54

Source: {Elenkov}

The news agencies, broadcast media and newspapers with highest circulation have maintained their online editions but one business model for the development of online media has not been observed yet (Raycheva, 2009: 174). The major websites of Bulgarian print and broadcasting media organizations are built mainly upon their traditional content with a low level of innovation, creativity and participation. Most of the online news platforms are reproducing the traditional media content and thus are not different from the editions of the newspapers and they are lagging behind technologically. Furthermore, some of the tabloids have not yet developed their websites claiming that their target audiences do not yet use the Internet {Elenkov}.

However, the online content of some print media such as “Dnevnik” (the 11th most popular website in Bulgaria) and the financial weekly “Capital” (the 35th most popular website in Bulgaria) are much fuller than the printed versions and offer various opportunities for interaction:

“There are very good players in their essence and it also goes with the level of readers that you have (...) We have a very educated community that lives abroad, people who emigrated, especially recently, so they are reading this online edition and they very actively participate in discussions. And this is where you can actually see the real debate going on”. {Zlatev}

Generally, it is believed that the technological development might have already improved the level of media accountability and transparency of media, and:

“Bulgaria is not lagging behind this process that is going on across Europe” {Zlatev}.

The system of media accountability and transparency will further develop from the usage of new platforms, most notably mobile devices {Elenkov}. While the debate is expected to be on-going, the process of introducing MA practices online will be rather slow {Raycheva} and the issues of accountability and transparency should not be connected only to the sector of media, but also in sub-sectors where the issue of governance is being discussed {Zankova}. Although independence from political interference may further stimulate people’s interactivity

“[Bulgaria] does not have a well-developed civil society that could be reflective on this” {Raycheva}.

Among the factors that need to be improved in order to strengthen media accountability practices in Bulgaria is education towards the usage of media {Raycheva; Zankova}, about which Zlatev provides a fuller explanation:

“Media should be educating its users and consumers, and at the same time users and consumers should be critical towards media, so media could become better and could improve. So you have the intellectual elite, group of more educated people that are actually seeing and exploiting this function of the media, but the majority is still lagging behind” (...) What is still needed is the assistance coming from states with better developed media self-regulatory and accountability systems, and patience, because self-regulation is not a destination, it’s a process”. {Zlatev}

Hence, the proposal to monitor how other countries are dealing with the current developments of MA emphasizes the need for a quicker response to the development of new technologies {Zlatev}.

A key aspect of the debate on the future development of MA, beyond being applied to websites, is that MA should be extended to all communication on the Internet allowing the publics' voice to be heard {Zankova}. Thus, the need for strengthening the level of media independence and the new role of journalists in the process of improving MA in Bulgaria:

“If they [journalists] are more courageous [than the politicians] to fight for their freedom they are going to win” {Arnaudova}.

2. Online media accountability practices initiated by media

Practices initiated by media fostering both MA and transparency online in Bulgaria are not yet widespread. Although those mechanisms do exist, they are not respected to the necessary extent {Zankova; Arnaudova}.

The practices of media accountability and transparency initiated by media have been mainly analyzed by emphasizing traditional instruments such as mail and phone correspondence in the performance of traditional media organizations. For instance, listeners of the Bulgarian National Radio can express their views on the quality of programming and the current work, especially during the radio shows that are broadcast live {Milanova; Radovanov}. Examples of MA innovations online have been emphasized mainly in the contexts of RSS feeds, mobile technologies, journalistic blogs, video games and social networks with the prominent previously mentioned examples of “Dnevnik” and “Capital” offering the audiences different forms of interaction.

MA and transparency practices online have been analyzed with regard to the level of actor transparency, production transparency and the level of media responsiveness.²

2.1 Actor transparency

Actor transparency involves practices where media organizations offer contextual information about their ownership and ethical codes, as well as about the journalists producing the news stories. Very few media organizations in Bulgaria have introduced mechanisms supporting the

² The typology of practices has been defined by the research team in the Work Package 4 of the MediaAcT project. We reproduce an excerpt of the definitions in each section, but the reader is invited to see the introductory document for this collection of country reports for more details.

level of actor transparency (see Table 2). For instance, not every media organizations that signed the media code of ethics have published the document on their websites:

“It could be used as a tool although it is still a `sleeping mechanism` for the time being”. {Zankova}

While media blogs written by journalists and published within media organizations do exist, they are not that common {Zlatev}.

Table 2: Practices fostering actor transparency in the Bulgarian online news websites

Practice	Available at online news websites
Bylines	Few
Profiles of Journalists	Few
Journalist blogs	Few
Published mission statements	Usually no
Published Code of Ethics	Few
Published in-house code of ethics or news policy documents	Usually No
Public information on company ownership	Usually no

2.2 Production transparency

Production transparency denotes practices where media organizations disclose to users information about their sources and the professional decisions made in the process of producing news. Social networks have been so far the most popular instruments of MA fostering the transparency of media production. As previously mentioned, there are approximately 1.89 million Bulgarian profiles on Facebook (27 per cent of the population but 56 per cent of Internet users) in 2010 making Facebook the most popular medium in Bulgaria:

“[Facebook] is huge, and what scares me is that people just forget to browse the web, they just see what other people shared and subscribed to”. {Elenkov}

Although Twitter is not yet as popular as Facebook and will need time to become more relevant to the public, media organizations have taken advantage of Twitter to publish their RSS feeds without additional information {Elenkov}.

Media organizations use social networks to either target new audiences or develop new topics {Antonova}, however, for young people:

“Social networks are not used for topics related to politics, economics and democracy”. {Raycheva}

There are some concerns with respect to aesthetics and thus to the social impact of their performance {Zankova} and within the milieu of media (e.g. Bulgarian National Radio), it is out of choice journalists join social networks:

"It is a question of professionalism and good will of journalists to be there"
{Radovanov}.

Newsroom blogs, collaborative news production as well as citizen journalism initiatives introduced by media have not yet created common practices in the improvement of MA systems in Bulgaria. Indeed Gordana Vilović (2011: 135) explains the current media developments in countries of South Eastern Europe:

"One thing is sure - bloggers are out, Facebook is in" (see Table 3).

Table 3: Practices fostering production transparency in the Bulgarian online news services.

Practice	Available at online news websites
Links to original sources	Rare
Newsroom blogs	Usually no
Presence in the Facebook	Yes
Presence in Twitter	Few
Collaborative news production	Usually no
Citizen journalism, initiated by the news media	Experimenting

2.3 Responsiveness

Responsiveness denotes news organizations' reactions to feedback from users related to news accuracy and journalistic performance. More and more people in Bulgaria have started to express their concern and anger that media have actually become the mouthpiece for government and power holders rather than being the watchdog and serving the interest of the public {Zlatev}. At the same time media users have become more active with providing criticism of media's performance, which is mainly entertainment, yellow and boulevard

"which is OK but there is a limit and then it becomes unacceptable any longer for you".
{Zlatev}

However, many mechanisms that could further improve the feedback activities of different audience groups and thus, the level of responsiveness, have been implemented by only a few media organizations. Among the most popular practices, introduced by "Capital", "Dnevnik" and online services of public service media is the ability to comment on the news (see Table 4).

However,:

"Some of the people do not criticize the media by their own blogs – but they rather forward anonymous comments under the publication. Which is not good I think – it is a part of a dirty game". {Radovanov}

Table 4: Online practices fostering user-generated content

Practice	Available at online news websites
Feedback form and tip-offs	Usually no
Correction buttons	No
Online news comments	Usually yes
Audience blogs	Limited

3. Online media accountability practices initiated outside the media

Among the practices external to media organizations are journalist blogs, the emergence of social networks and the development of 'citizen journalism'; all of which are, however, relatively new and untested phenomena (Raycheva, 2009: 174).

3.1 Journalist blogs and citizen journalism

Although reliable data on the usage of blogs in Bulgaria does not exist, an authoritative research estimate suggests approximately 35,000 registered blogs at the beginning of 2009 (Smilova et al. 2010: 10). Most of the existing blogs are dedicated to political issues and, with very few examples, people generally restrain from making comments on the performance of media organizations {Elenkov} But journalist's blogs are a rarity:

“We have a couple of very popular bloggers, that are very much read and visited by readers, but they are journalists on their own (...) It is rather a novice for our reality here”. {Zlatev}

Among the few significant examples of citizens' activities related to the media are 'Blog About the Open Web' created by Bogo and the website and blog of Veni Markovski, which analyzes national and international news as well as recent developments in online services, cyber security, and the information society. A blog created by Nelly Ognyanova - a Bulgarian media expert in media law and policy, and an associate professor at Sofia University, analyzes the most recent developments of Bulgarian media system (see Case 3).

Case 3: Citizen blogs and websites related to media performance

Blog About the Open Web created by Bogo: <http://talkweb.eu/>

Veni Markovic blog: <http://blog.veni.com/>

Nelly Ognyanova blog: <http://ognyanova.wordpress.com/>

Veni Markovski and Nelly Ognyanova participated in the discussions on torrent sites and the balance between access to information and copyright protection, and in doing so exemplified citizens' input to the discussion on media regulation through blogs.

The impact of citizen journalism will depend upon public debates and campaigns during the process of elaboration and adoption of the laws in the field of data retention (see Case 4) and copyright (see Case 6). Public discussions are necessary on media concentration and transparency of funding of Bulgarian media, while campaigns are needed to disclose the secrets of the communist intelligence agencies and for the independence of editors-in-chief. Eco-activism provides a fine example of citizen's online-organized support (see Case 5).

Case 4: Public discussions during the process of elaboration and adoption of the laws in the field of data retention

In January 2010 a protest in front of the Parliament with the slogan "Bulgaria is not Big Brother, 2010 is not 1984" against the amendment to the data retention law was organized. The proposed amendments contained provisions that allow the Ministry of Interior and other agencies to permanently monitor, without control, the behavior, movement and other information on any Bulgarian citizen, whether guilty of a crime or not. In line with this, an official protest letter was publicly drafted and discussed online and posted to the Facebook group *Не искаме МВР да ни следи безконтролно в Интернет!* (We do not want the Interior Ministry to eavesdrop on us online without control), along with a list of mobile phone numbers of Members of Parliament and an appeal to users to call or SMS their MPs to vote against the amendments.

Links:

Bulgaria is not Big Brother, 2010 is not 1984. Retrieved 18 December 2010 from <http://bogomil.blogactiv.eu/2010/01/07/bulgaria-is-not-big-brother-2010-is-not-1984/>

Case 5: Eco-activism and online-organized support of eco-causes and eco-activism

In 2007 some bloggers, including Michel Bozgounov attempted to create an online petition to save Strandja mountain in South-East Bulgaria which was about to be stripped of its protected status by an investor eager to build a hotel. Many youths who care about the preservation of nature started to protest peacefully, and their meetings gathered quickly and spontaneously after posts in a few blogs and websites. However, after expressing his views online, Michel Bozgounov was called by the police and officially warned about his blogging. Later in the story called "A Short Story: To Speak or Not?" he reported:

"I never thought this could be something illegal - many official media wrote about the remonstrances and numerous bloggers did it just like I did, many of them even used stronger language than me and aggressive words, which I don't like (...) On the stairs one of the police officers told me "in private" that I should be more careful what I am writing about in future, because journalists have a better defense against possible prosecution and I am just an ordinary person, an independent blogger". (Bozgounov)

Links:

Bulgarian Police intimidating a blogger. Retrieved 4 January 2011 from <http://mayas-corner.blogspot.com/2007/07/bulgarian-police-intimidating-blogger.html>

A Short Story. To Speak or Not? Retrieved 4 January 2011 from <http://www.optimiced.com/en/2007/07/18/a-short-story-to-speak-or-not/>

Case 6: The copyrights of bloggers

Blogger Elenko Elenkov has just won two court cases against '24 часа' ('24 Hours') - one of the largest-circulation newspapers in Bulgaria. The journalists had lifted an image from Elenkov's blog and published it on the front page of '24 часа' quoting Elenkov as an unnamed "Internet source". Elenkov claims the court processes took him four years which is an absurdity:

"Most of the media in Bulgaria don't give credit to each other. They don't understand what the Internet stands for, and that the copyrights belong to the author". {Elenkov}

Links:

Elenko Elenkov blog. Retrieved 20 December 2010 from <http://eenk.com>

Generally, the content in many existing blogs in Bulgaria has been designed as opposition to a concept or institution and consequently does not follow journalistic standards or have a balanced view, which will cause the blogger problems:

"There is a lot of hate (...) but if you are not balanced nobody takes you seriously" {Elenkov}.

Blogs also face a particularly Bulgarian societal characteristic:

"In Bulgaria there is a suspicion towards everything including whether one is able to sustain the independent blog or information". {Antonova}

3.2 Other external initiatives supporting media accountability and transparency online

Additional external initiatives supporting the development of media accountability and transparency in Bulgaria include the emergence of different platforms and associations dealing with issues of ethical behavior online, such as the Internet Society of Bulgaria (ISOC), an independent non-profit organization created in 1995. ISOC developed a platform for reliable information after the development of information technologies in Bulgaria. The main areas of its activities include promotion of more rapid development of the Internet and the Information Society, protection of human rights on the Internet and building partnership with global organizations Internet relevant organizations, such as: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), European Digital Rights Initiatives (EDRI) and Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Experts from ISOC actively participate in the work of different

administrations and organizations, including the National Assembly, Ministries and agencies within the Bulgarian Council of Ministers. ISOC maintains a blog which is open to everybody who is interested in sharing comments and views in this area (Internet Society Bulgaria).

Among the other examples are current operations of the Interactive Association (IA) Bulgaria, promoting the Internet as one of the main channels of communication, along with television, radio, press and outdoor advertising (Interactive Association Bulgaria). IA Bulgaria is a highly promising new association with clear goals for ethical behavior online {Elenkov}. To this end, Electronic Frontier Bulgaria (EFB), an organization for the protection of free information and of privacy in the electronic communication sector was created. The project involves more than 300 activists fighting for the protection of freedom of expression and against 'the uncontrolled intrusion of the authorities into the private space'. In 2010 it won the 3rd place of the Human of the Year Awards, created by Bulgarian Helsinki Committee for people and organizations facilitating the human rights debate and activism in Bulgaria (Electronic Frontier Bulgaria; Attorney Daniela Dokovska - Human of the Year 2010).

4. Conclusions

There is not much debate on the development of MA systems in Bulgaria and even less relate to online media. This is due to the early stage of introduction of self-regulatory mechanisms on the Internet as well as the users' behavior since priority is still given to traditional media organizations. Research has proved that due to unclear legislative framework and the lack of effectiveness in the implementation of media regulation (ownership, media code of ethics, the Council for Electronic Media) many problems with regard to the performance of traditional MA institutions have been observed. Thus, many distinctions between theory and practice exist and a suitable level of media independence from political interference or pressure has yet to be achieved.

Very few media organizations have introduced mechanisms supporting the level of actor transparency, including bylines, profiles of journalists, media blogs, published mission statements or information on media ownership. Furthermore, not every media outlet that signed the media code of ethics has published the document on its website. Social networks have been so far the most popular instruments fostering the transparency of media production, with the significant example of Facebook – the most popular online medium in Bulgaria in 2010. However, with the exception of practice related to online news comments, most of the mechanisms that could further improve the feedback activities of different audience groups and thus, the level of responsiveness, have been introduced by only a few media organizations.

Bulgarian citizens generally restrain from making comments on the performance of media organizations. So far there have been only few examples of citizen journalism dedicated to discussions on the development of media regulation and the issue of copyrights in the rapidly changing information society. Citizens have used online media platforms mostly to take an active part in initiatives on social and political issues, such as eco-activism or disclosure of the communist past. However, the practice has shown that their efforts to discuss those issues through the sector of media have not always been effective.

Hence, MA and transparency innovations online that could be introduced both internally and externally to media organizations have been absent and there has not been a clear understanding of the MA and transparency model when looking to the future. It is expected that the debate on the future development of media in Bulgaria should be connected to the ongoing discussions on media literacy, the multi-stakeholder approach to governance, initiatives undertaken by associations dealing with issues of ethical behavior online and the overall debate on a quicker response to users' behavior and new technologies.

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Vesislava Antonova, Capital Weekly, Editor media and advertising

Anna Arnaudova, former TV journalist

Elenko Elenkov, blogger, eenk.com

Albena Milanova, Bulgarian National Radio, Director of International Relations Department

Stefan Radovanov, Bulgarian National Radio, Director of Programming

Lilia Raycheva, Professor, Sofia University St.Kliment Ohridski

Bissera Zankova, Media consultant, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Directorate on Information Technology, Member of the Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMC), member of the Committee of Experts on New Media (MC-NM) and the member of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Public Service Media Governance (MC-S-PG), Council of Europe

Ognian Zlatev, Managing Director, Media Development Center Bulgaria, board member of the National Council for Journalism Ethics of Bulgaria, member of the managing board of Bulgarian National TV

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