



White Book

of Professional
and Labour Rights
of Journalists



CCM

Independent Union of
Journalist and Media Workers

Publisher:
Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers

Editor:
Zvezdan Georgievski

Legal comments:
Dimitar Apasiev

Proofreading:
Olivera Korveziroska

English translation:
Ana Vasileva

Design:
Zoran Richliev



**Independent Union
of Journalists and
Media Workers**

ssnm.org.mk



**British Embassy
Skopje**

The British Embassy in Skopje supported the preparation of this publication, within the project “Upholding the labor rights in media”.
The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the British Embassy in Skopje

Contents:

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 7 |
| Dismissals | |
| The case of Biljana Jovanovska and her colleagues against MPM | 13 |
| Fixed-term contracts | |
| Short leash for the journalists | 23 |
| Correspondents | |
| Discriminated in every aspect | 33 |
| Freelancing | |
| An army of journalists are forced to work on "the black market" | 41 |
| Self-censorship | |
| Silenced by owners, editors, politicians and resigned to their fate | 51 |
| Critical media | |
| In-between closing-down and censure | 61 |
| Research | |
| The low levels of Macedonian journalism | 73 |
| Survey | |
| Survey on the workers' and professional rights in the media | 77 |
| Instead of a summary | 91 |

Introduction

The Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers of Macedonia for a certain period of time already felt the need to summarize the bulkiest problems of Macedonian journalism in a separate document, which would analyze the difficulties that its members, as well as journalists in general, are facing on every-day basis. One of the results of this process of ripening is exactly this study on the workers' rights and professional standards of Macedonian journalists.

IN-DEPTH SCREENING OF THE MOST NEURALGIC POINTS OF MACEDONIAN JOURNALISM

The ambition was not to carry out some sort of quantitative, in-depth screening of the most neuralgic points of Macedonian journalism, since, finally, it is questionable to what extent that would even be possible at this point in time considering, above all, the lack of transparency both of the media structures and the ruling elites, as well as that of the remaining factors completing the Macedonian media image, as well as the general atmosphere of fear and apathy

among the professional journalists. These assumed markers were dramatically confirmed during the process of developing the "White Book" on Workers' Rights and Professional Standards. One of the manifest characteristics of the exposed situations - which the curious reader may be quick to notice - is the anonymity of the respondents. The audacity to present their findings boldly, under their own name and surname was mainly expressed by the already exposed journalists, meaning those working in the so-called independent media, the media which have established a criticizing tone towards the government in their editorial policies. Alas, probably these experiences also speak well enough about the level of Macedonian journalism nowadays.

Nevertheless, even as it is structured and arranged, the "White Book" contains enough elements to depict the big picture. It practically consists of six texts and a research which was carried out on a representative sample of

Macedonian journalists by the M-Prospect Agency, for the purposes of the "White Book". The selected topics of consideration, although presented as six separate text units, in fact serve as coordinates on the Macedonian journalistic map, and certainly, as such, create a whole, i.e. an outline and overview of probably the most acute current problems in the areas of labour relations and professional standards. From an editor's point of view, the principle of selection of topics was imposed by the mere results of the research, as well as the elaborations of the authors themselves who defended their theses at an open call, announced with the exact purpose order to define the neuralgic points that need to be treated. Undoubtedly, a certain subjective criteria in the creation of this publication cannot be completely overruled.

Although during its development this book involved a line of interviewees, meaning that practically tens of cases of violation of journalistic rights have been treated, the specific case of the journalists from "Utrinski vesnik" (represented with the example of Biljana Jovanovska), who lost their jobs due to union activities, i.e. spontaneous protest, was subject to in-depth analysis. This case marks a certain borderline, which turned something unprecedented into a rule. In fact, henceforth, superb professionals have lost their jobs with unparalleled ease, due to reasons which are almost never explained away with lack of professionalism, disregard of duties or unsatisfactory quality of work. The case of the journalists of "Utrinski vesnik" is also prominent for its inconsistent court practice, as well as the controversial and exclusionary rulings of the judicial authorities.

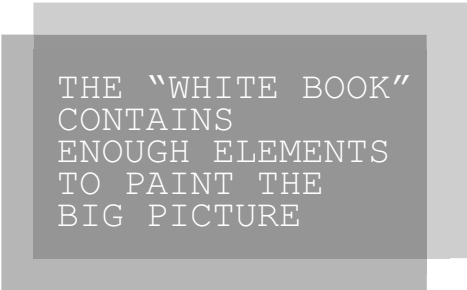
This practice, as well as the frequent changes to the Law on Labour Relations are making way for another exception be established as a rule - fixed-term employment. In fact, the fixed-term employment contracts probably are the easiest way in which employers keep journalists on a "short leash". It is already becoming practice to have the contract extended by the month, and it so happens that even those short-term contracts are not complied with, and journalists lose their jobs without any explanation whatsoever. This practice serves to teach the guild of journalists a lesson, i.e. to control their work.

The position of the free-lance contributors is also similar. Although this type of employment is practically non-existent in the positive legal acts, it is a public secret that the freelance engagement is one of the most frequently employed in the Macedonian media. The selective approach and the practice of the inspection services to frequently turn a blind eye to certain things, have led to a pool of a huge number of completely unprotected journalists. The typical characteristic of this group of journalists is their low payment, overtime work, non-payment of any benefits guaranteed with the employment, in one word - complete social and existential uncertainty.

In terms of percentages, the number of journalists with free-lance status is highest among the correspondents from the inside of the country. In other aspects too, correspondents are among the most vulnerable groups of journalists. In addition to being paid under any decent level, they work in totally substandard conditions, using their own assets to be able to work

(computers, photo-cameras, cameras, automobiles) and often having to do several jobs in order to provide for themselves. Their relationship with the "central editorial offices" may most often be described as "responsibilities without rights". Their needs always come last on the agenda (if they somehow manage to even get on it), while the expectations for timely and comprehensive reporting are naturally assumed. In one word, the correspondents are the "forgotten" category of journalists.

The journalists working in the media trying to maintain certain higher professional standards and which are declared as independent from the Government's policies are in no easier position. These media are often subject to serious social and economic threats, most frequently by means of court lawsuits for defamation, the selective access to marketing assets, all the way to being disabled from professionally carrying out their assignments.



THE "WHITE BOOK"
CONTAINS
ENOUGH ELEMENTS
TO PAINT THE
BIG PICTURE

This overall picture leads to where it leads - turning the media into bulletins of certain political and economic centers of power, taking advantage of the media for business and political interests, turning journalists into some kind of deformed social-political workers. All of this may not serve to any other purpose, but dominance of non-professionalism. In fact, widespread utilization of censorship and self-censorship, hate

speech, spinning information, disinformation, illiteracy...

Although the focus is on how the profession of a journalist is carried out, the summary of results that the "White Book" came up with can lead us to an assessment of the situation with the Macedonian society, since the disastrous state of the Macedonian media space is nothing else but an indicator of the democratic capacities of the country. The deprivation of exercising of one of the basic human rights - freedom of speech, further complicates the overall social, political, social, cultural and economic processes which inevitably leads to obliteration of the state tissue, driving the country into exclusively negative trends - a semi-totalitarian society ruled by pressures, censorship, economic dependence, concentrated power, corruptive models...

Although the primary aim of the "White Book" is to alarm, its secondary, yet no less important, purpose is to motivate. Namely, by diagnosing the problems and giving them exact formulations, we may also find the right therapy for the sick body of journalism. Hence, these texts remain not only as a testimony, but also as a motive to envision and reconsider the directions that need to be taken in order to consolidate the situation. It should also serve as incentive for a debate, as well as a call to take specific action. In this sense, if the resounding alarm reaches at least some peripheral parts of the active social awareness, then some results will be bound to occur. And then and only then shall we believe its publishing has been justified.

Having this publication in front of him, the editor is prepared to pay due recognition to his colleagues and participants in the project: Ljubomir Kostovski, Biljana Bogdanovska, Kristina Ozimec, Ilcho Cvetanovski, Sashka Cvetkovska and Frosina Dimeska, then the expert team of the M-Prospect Agency, Dimitar Apasiev for the legal comments, the President of SSNM Tamara Chausidis for her intensive involvement in the creation of the publication, as well as all the others who selflessly helped the publishing of the "White Book" with their efforts, advice and knowledge. All possible weaknesses of this study, are therefore to be ascribed solely to the editor.

Zvezdan Georgievski

White Book



■ The case of Biljana Jovanovska and her colleagues against MPM

The case with the decisions for termination of employment against a group of journalists from "Utrinski vesnik" from mid 2011 considers the position of journalists within our legal system from the aspect when they are faced, firstly, with the injustice in their native news company, which, as a powerful pillar in the informative space, finds ways to disable the rule of law in the area of labour relations, in those cases in which it is involved.

THESE EFFORTLESS
DISMISSALS HAVE
NOT FOUND
ADEQUATE
TREATMENT IN THE
LEGAL SYSTEM

Apparently, it is just an ordinary dispute between an employer and an employee (employees). However, due to the interest it triggered and the involvement of many factors in the process of journalists' protection, it resembles a model through which the position of journalism in the country can be observed in general.

The case with the journalist Biljana Jovanovska, as well as her four colleagues - Katica Changova, Olivera Vojnovska, Farko Shakiri and Tamara Grncharoska is an example of how the rule of law "loses strenght" as we move closer into the higher forms of legal protection of labour rights, as well as protection of some of the rights and liberties guaranteed in any democratic society.

At the same time, this case, which was exposed to the public, sent a clear message of what anyone who will try to express their right to workers' dissatisfaction by protesting or attempting to keep their jobs is in for.

Spontaneous rally

In the course of 2011, in the MPM company, part of the international concern West Allgemeine Zeitung (WAZ) was preparing to downsize the number of employees. Through formal and informal meetings of the employees in "Utrinski vesnik", one of the three daily newspapers published by this company, there were talks about the highest number of dismissals in proportion to the total number of employees.

One day after the 12th birthday of the daily, on the 24 June 2011, a visit of the management of the company to the editorial office was announced, in order to unofficially present their measures for downsizing of staff. The journalists, who found out about this, summon all their colleagues absent at that moment (due to annual holidays, days-off) to hear the decision affecting their destiny, together. Whereby, after they were informed about some of the facts, they expressed spontaneous dissatisfaction, which grew into a request for a press-conference and the right to acquaint the public with the situation.

The present journalists agreed the oldest among them - Biljana Jovanovska, to address the group of journalists who had arrived and reveal the decisions of the company's management, which had previously only been foreshadowed - at least ten dismissals were planned (maybe even more) to total number of 47 employees.

The address expressed fear that the announcements for dismissal of a fifth of the employees were only a step forward in the process of gradual extinction of the daily newspaper.

At the same time they said that their salaries, ranging from 200 to 400 EUR will remain at the same level and the dismissal of ten employees will not substantially improve the financial circumstances in the newspaper. Concurrently it was brought to attention that they were already understaffed as it were. A meeting was required between the management of MPM and the union of the newspaper, and interruption of work and no issue for the following day were announced as possible means of pressure in order for their requests to be fulfilled.

On the very same day (24 June 2011), the company issued a press-release in which the meeting was interpreted as an "act of whimsicality of individuals" and as "an attempt to cause a disruption in the work discipline". The press-conference was labeled as a call of unauthorized persons, and the data revealed as untrue to the true policy of the company.

The daily came out the next day with a decrease in the number of pages. There was no decrease in the number of advertisements, hence, there was no material damage from that aspect. The issue

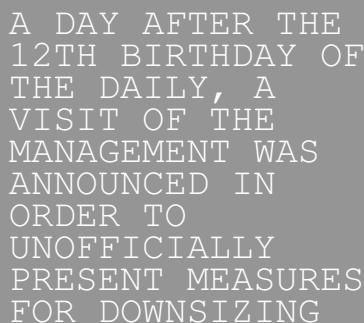
was prepared by the editor-in-chief and several section editors who disagreed with the interruption of work, and on the basis of existing materials which had already been archived, although some of them were created by the employees who in the meantime had announced a spontaneous halt in work.

Three days after this incident, representatives of the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers, the union of "Utrinski vesnik" and the management of MPM held a meeting regarding the development in "Utrinski vesnik", connected to the announcement for downsizing which led to a spontaneous interruption of work.

At the meeting, the Union presented the stance of the majority of members in "Utrinski vesnik" who did not accept the announcement for downsizing and sought negotiations in order to find a different solution. At the same time SSNM informed that although they had not been informed about the halt in work, since it happened spontaneously, they fully support the majority of members of staff who attended the events.

Bearing in mind the market logic, the management of MPM offered the union to prepare a proposal for a decrease in costs, which would not include downsizing. This proposal was presented to both the employees and the

management of "Utrinski vesnik" and it was accepted, but due to what further took place, it never came to be implemented.



A DAY AFTER THE
12TH BIRTHDAY OF
THE DAILY, A
VISIT OF THE
MANAGEMENT WAS
ANNOUNCED IN
ORDER TO
UNOFFICIALLY
PRESENT MEASURES
FOR DOWNSIZING

Express dismissals

Three days after the agreement between the Union and Utrinski's management, after employee Jovanovska was verbally informed that she has been suspended and that her texts will cease to be published, the manager of Krug LTD., which is part of WAZ, Srgjan Kerim, signed the decision for termination of her employment due to violation of the work order, discipline and work assignments, without notice period. Journalist Farko Shakiri was also dismissed, although he was not even working on the day in question, and had solely come to get informed about the intentions of the management and was active in the passing of the decision to stop work spontaneously.

In the decision for termination of employment from 1 July 2011,

the employer calls on Article 82, paragraph 1 and 239, from the Law on Labour Relations, Article 47 from the Guidebook on Labour Relations and from the Guidebook on Order and Discipline at Krug Ltd. (part of WAZ only including the daily newspapers Utrinski and Dnevnik).

The manager, in brief, claims that the halt in the work aims to stop the publishing of the daily and that it is organized by several journalists. Also, it is being highlighted that the protected is not supported by the Union organization and the editor-in-chief.

PH. Union reaction

The news about the layoffs at Utrinski sent all the journalist associations through the roof. SSNM and the Association of Journalists of Macedonia expressed strong solidarity with their colleagues from "Utrinski vesnik", who opposed the intention of MPM's management to lay journalists off as means of punishing them for expressing workers' dissatisfaction.

ZNM supported the action of SSNM for solidarity with the colleagues from "Utrinski vesnik" by signing the statement of support and urging their members to massively support the action.

Motivated by these layoffs, as well as the overall situation that the journalists were facing - the closing of the media such as A1TV, Vreme, Shpic, and Koha E Re on 5 July 2011 - the journalists, freelancers, photo-journalists, cameramen and technical staff from all the media in Macedonia stood in defense of their labour rights and held a protest march in the center of town, on Macedonia Square.

Protest organizers were the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers in Macedonia and the Journalists Association of Macedonia. At the protest, the journalists demanded from the employers to recognize the union as a real partner in the social dialogue and not to allow the labour of journalists to be treated as a tool to fulfill personal business or political interests.

On that same day, the reaction coming from the German Union VER.di expressed support for the struggle of the Macedonian journalists for their rights. They demanded from the board in Germany and Macedonia "to act in accordance with the German standards of civility and correctness". The layoffs were assessed as "unprecedented and inappropriate" and it was demanded that employees go back to their jobs, and all business plans and professional moves in future to be transparent and adopted on time in coordination with the union.

What happened afterwards: - Some of the protesters from "Utrinski vesnik", who were present at the event, found decisions for termination of employment on their desks. The number of people with decisions for termination of employment, despite the alleged agreement with the Union, simply proved to be false. At

that moment MPM revealed its face as a company which would not accept social dialogue with the relevant partners, such as the union organization of the company in question or the union organization on state level.

SSNM issued a press-release stating that "at the moment when hundreds of journalists were on protest, among other things to give their support and show solidarity with the two colleagues who expressly lost their jobs on Friday, MPM responded with new dismissals. That is why we are left with nothing else but to establish the double morality of the company which was the first one to start the dialogue with the Union, but has now canceled it and destroyed the principles of correctness. The dismissals of our colleagues will not dishearten us and we shall not allow the union activism to be nipped in the bud"

SOME OF THE
PROTESTERS
FROM "UTRINSKI
VESNIK" FOUND
DECISIONS FOR
TERMINATION OF
EMPLOYMENT ON
THEIR DESKS

Legal procedure

The protection of labour rights of the workers from "Utrinski vesnik", after the first five out of the dozen employees who were laid off by the company, then proceeded by means of legal disputes.

On 18 July 2011, the State Labour Inspectorate issued a press-release which stated that they had received five written requests for protection of the labour rights by employees of Krug Ltd. (Olivera Vojnovska, Tamara Grncharoska, Biljana Jovanovska, Farko Shakiri and Katica Changova), that they performed inspection supervision and established that the employees may not be given, in accordance with the LoLR, dismissals without a notice period. The decision (07 - 1443) was to be implemented immediately. This decision, in an extensive elaboration, relied on the fact that the grounds the dismissals were based on may not lead to the outcome - dismissal with no notice period.

In some of the court procedures it is evident that at the start the judge's free conviction that none of the opinions of the actors in this labour dispute (labour inspections, union organizations - the branch and SSNM) are to be taken as relevant, prevails, so the journalists Olivera Vojnovska, Katica Changova and Tamara Grncharovska lost the cases in the Primary Court and in the Appellative Court and are now at the Supreme Court.

The Courts in some inexplicable way did not abide by to the procedure which must be followed when handing decisions for termination of employment and which assumes that it not possible

to dismiss someone without disciplinary procedure, which is a rule without an exception.

The plot-twist occurred at the end of last year and the beginning of this one.

Namely, journalist Farko Shakiri was recently brought back into the company and offered a job, but in another newsroom, after his lawsuit was adopted and entered force.

With the verdict of the Primary Court received on the 17 January this year, and adopted on the 31 December last year, the decision for termination of employment of journalist Biljana Jovanovska was annulled as unlawful.

This, at first sight, can be perceived as a finale upholding justice and the rule of law, had there not been different treatment of the same cases, with identical witnesses and identical facts, not only by different judges, but by the same judge who ruled the lawsuits of Jovanovska and Changova.

Furthermore, it was the same judge who ruled that the implementation of Article 293, item 3 from LoLR holds no ground in Jovanovska's case, since it did not meet the conditions for handing a dismissal without a notice period, while in Changova's case he ruled differently.

Representatives of the Helsinki Committee were present at the trials of the journalists. The most substantial violation of the journalists' rights was that their lawfully warranted right to a notice period of six months was breached. However, the court ruling for one of the plaintiffs came as late as two and a half years after the start of the court procedure.

- The right to a high-priority and speedy trial is also related to the right to work and other, related rights. They are crucial to the subsistence of families and are impermissible in the court practice, since the legislator has not set the existing deadlines (up to six months) by accident - the Helsinki Committee says.

According to this organization, working for the promotion and protection of human rights, by having journalists sacked from work immediately after they expressed their dissatisfaction, a severe blow was dealt to the right of freedom of expression, and the right to act in unions or otherwise, especially when their basic existential right was threatened.

Summary

Although the court processes have not finished yet, from the attempts made so far by the group of journalists from "Utrinski vesnik" to protect themselves from the dismissals they were handed, and the multitude of organizations and institutions

involved in this labour dispute, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First of all, the biggest print media company in Macedonia - MPM, as part, at the time, of a company with worldwide reputation in this area, failed to bring modern understanding of the partnering relations between corporate management and its employees. Even when they tried to commence a dialogue between the union and the employer on grounds of redundancy, and an initial solution was reached, the contract was terminated unilaterally and the old policy of applying "brute force" was resumed.

Further on, a rationalization model was passed without the participation of the employees. It was passed with unfamiliar quantifying elements and without revealing the final goals of the so-called downsizing. In fact, the above-mentioned contracts for termination of employment in "Utrinski vesnik", as well as other contracts for termination of employment that ensued, served to remove or send away a dozen of employees, yet afterwards, employees from other news companies (Dnevnik) were transferred there. In the meantime, this publisher also founded other publications where the "surplus journalists" qualified for their work could have been transferred, yet they opted to hire completely new journalists, at an open call. This raises the doubts that MPM regarded its journalists as "suitable" and "undesirable" employees and hence the downsizing was

MPM, AS PART,
AT THE TIME,
OF A COMPANY
WITH WORLDWIDE
REPUTATION IN
THIS AREA, FAILED
TO BRING MODERN
UNDERSTANDING OF
THE PARTNERING
RELATIONS BETWEEN
CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT AND
ITS EMPLOYEES

triggered by other motives.

Hence, the claims of the Union that these measures against the employees who dared to demonstrate dissatisfaction were inevitably designed to instill fear among the journalists and affect their organized actions in unions or other professional bodies.

By instilling fear, by not allowing free expression of individual opinions within the company, they also affected the journalists as creative and free individuals who need to be perceptive to all the social issues that they face and that they need to report about or comment on!

The lack of solidarity among journalists themselves is also an issue that imposed itself in this case too, as well as the question of the low interest in getting organized as a union, which has been a global trend for years, but also a bad signpost when it comes to

defending journalists' working rights, since they are expected to demonstrate higher awareness in getting self-organized in legal institutions within the system.

The issue of the behaviour of some of the institutions (the Administrative Court, part of the regular courts) points to the fact that verdicts are passed based on impressions, the decisions are not grounded on material rights, and there is an impermissible discrepancy in the decision-making between the same or similar institutions (organs of inspection - the Administrative Court) or the judges within the same courts.

Ljubomir Kostovski

The revanchist suspensions and express layoffs, as malicious "strike-breaking measures" directed towards those employees who are a little more rebellious than the others and want to express their anger spontaneously, range among the most stressful in the Macedonian labour-law practice. This, on the other hand, raises the essential problem of our modern labour law - which is the disabling of the constitutional right to strike, as the ultimate, natural and legal, as well as legitimate measure for protection of workers' rights.

From a legal point of view, on the other hand, regarding the unpopular grounds of layoffs - with or without a notice period - or, as it has been defined in the LLR, "the means of termination of the employment contract" in the two-decade transition period, there was a profound and disturbing deterioration of the workers' rights! The employers mainly took advantage of these draconic and merciless methods to quickly hand out "discipline dismissal" when they encountered organized resistance of the employees, regardless of whether they were organized in unions, and the legislation completely failed in fulfilling its protective role, especially in cases when we had completely malicious,

unjustified, deliberate and unlawful announcements of massive layoffs or redundancies of numbers of journalists from various media, who dared to publicly speak about the problems at their workplace, or the pressures they have been exposed to by their editors and managers. Furthermore, with the infiltration of neoliberal doctrines in the area of labour legislation, the government's tendency to

discourage employees from exercising this essential collective right of theirs, as a direct method of protection of their rights, is obvious. Thus, through the series of too frequent changes and amendments to the Law on Labour Relations, a line of repressive measures was being introduced which had the tendency to discourage striking, even at the price of being anti-constitutional - by burdening them with a line of bureaucratic procedures which need to be completed before a legitimate strike starts (for example: only a union may occur as a lawful strike organizer; an obligation was introduced for a preceding attempt to run a procedure for reconciliation with the employer; a possibility was introduced to pay a compensation for the possible damage inflicted on the employer - thus ruining the mere essence of the notion of strike; a huge list was introduced of so-called production and maintenance and necessary processes which may not be interrupted during the strike; the rights to an employment relationship in a time of strike were diminished; a line of violation provisions against "undisciplined strikers" was introduced, etc). The overcoming of this immense located problem in future would have to take place through certain deregulation and legal "relaxation" of this crucial matter, since at present it is suffocated by excessive legal regulation, which has de facto disabled exercising the right to a strike in practice.

LEGAL COMMENT



Short leash for the journalists

Yesterday a pay-rise as a reward for a good employee, today notice of dismissal. In the morning covering an event as a journalist, at noon you have no more job to go to. This is the shock that a journalist employed in a TV station experienced before the end of the previous year. It is the latest case with a notice of dismissal quoting the explanation “due to business reasons” - a phrase allowed by law, and which has been massively (ab)used by owners in the past few years to get rid of the journalists who are deemed undesirable by the government, media-owners or editors.

THE FIXED-TERM
CONTRACTS INSTILL
A FEELING OF
UNCERTAINTY IN
JOURNALISTS;
THEY FEEL
INTIMIDATED
BECAUSE THEY MAY
LOSE THEIR JOBS

This is an outrageous example of dismissal without any notice, without specific fault in the worker and without a detailed explanation by the employer. A journalist lost her job within a few hours, and to date, no one wants to tell her what it was that she did wrong. Especially since, prior to the dismissal, there had been no problems which would have prepared her to anticipate this

move on the part of the employer.

- The employment contracts were of a three-month duration and they were extended over and over again. I signed the last contract on 8 November 2013, also with a duration of three months. Before I signed it, I also got an accompanying letter by the employers stating that they are satisfied with my work and that they would like to extend the contract. On the 11.12.2013 we got the salary for November, including a bonus of one thousand MKD for me and a few other colleagues, for the good quality of our work. Only a day later,

on 12.12.2013, the programme director of the television station informed me that he had been notified by the owners that there is a contract for termination of employment for me - the journalist testifies.

In this particular case, the employer did not even wait for the signed contract expiring in February this year to run out. In the haste to hand her the dismissal notice, they even made procedural mistakes - one of them is that instead of in person, they sent the dismissal notice by mail.

- I was astounded and shocked, even more so since my direct superiors, the programme director and the editor-in-chief, were unable to state any reasons for the dismissal. The same goes for the company manager who signed the dismissal notice. The notice was sent by mail to my home address, and I demanded that they send it by e-mail too. Only then did I find out that it is a dismissal that the company explained away with business reasons, and a decrease in the volume of work of the employer - she says.

This journalist has about ten years of professional experience behind her. She was part of the team that launched the television station three years ago. First she held the position of news-block editor. After a few journalists were dismissed in July 2011, she was replaced from her position and was given solely reporting assignments. However, there had never been any objections to her work.

- The dismissal was instantaneous, without any notice period. I was taken aback, since nothing had prepared me for such a thing. That same morning I was covering an event, and I did not expect in any way that only a few hours later I would be without a job. The first thing that came to my mind was that maybe there is another, background reason. Yet, no one wanted, or could explain what that would be. I still do not believe that the dismissal was due to economic reasons. There is no way I can prove this and find out what really happened.

She is confused by the wording “business reasons”, since there had been no indicators of a crisis in the company - on the contrary, since the beginning, the volume of work was steadily increasing, more news-blocks were introduced, and the marketing revenues were on the rise.

They keep us in suspense

This example depicts the professional uncertainty faced by most of the journalists in Macedonian media - they work and live with the possibility that every single day it may be the last day at work for them, on daily basis. Regardless of how big a problem it is that they

put their livelihood, or that or that of their families on the line, it is even scarier to think that months will pass before they get another job as journalists - if they manage to find one at all.

The fixed-term employment contracts are mainly found in the media. Most typically, those would be one-month, three-month, or six-month contracts. Natalija Radovojevic Milenkova, a lawyer representing journalists through the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers, says that this situation dates back from 2010-2011, when the widespread dismissals of “undesirable” journalists started.

- I believe that broadly, the employers' tendency is to alleviate the manner of laying off employees, and the fixed-term employment contract is the most elegant way to do so. We are witnessing an increased tendency in which the decision of whether a journalist should stay or not, depends more on external factors than on the immediate employer. In such circumstances, the fixed-term contract is the easy way out for an employer, providing them with means to terminate the employment in cases when there are no relevant reasons for termination of employment. Therefore, employees, when signing fixed-term contracts, need to be aware that their employment will last as long as the duration of the contract - says Radivojevic Milenkova.

THE EMPLOYERS'
TENDENCY IS TO
ALLEVIATE THE
MANNER OF LAYING
OFF EMPLOYEES,
AND THE FIXED-
TERM EMPLOYMENT
CONTRACT IS THE
MOST ELEGANT WAY
TO DO SO

Those who have signed one-year contracts, may consider themselves lucky. There also are permanent-employment contracts, but, according to the experiences from the newsrooms, they are becoming outnumbered compared with the fixed-term ones.

With those several-month long contracts, journalists do not feel protected by the law at all. This also applies to cases when the contract is still valid, as in the case quoted above. Those contracts too, can be terminated overnight by the owner, even before the deadline for the period they have been signed runs out. It suffices to state that it is done due to business reasons. Thus, the Law on Labour Relations shall be complied with, and not even the court will demand to hear an explanation for the act from the owner.

- I have a three-month employment contract with the news office. It has been extended several times so far, but without a visible intention to be replaced by a permanent employment contract. This has given me a few signals: that they like keeping us on a short leash, intimidating us with the fact that we can easily

lose our jobs in circumstances when there already are too many unemployed journalists. My impression is that this is a result of the desire to control what we write, with the message that if something is not to their interest, they can easily get rid of us, and replace us with someone else, without a legal obstacle - a journalist working in a portal says.

He sees his employment contract as means through which employers can protect themselves from lawsuits from journalists, and not as an instrument which would provide rights and rules of fair game to journalists.

- Certainly, the working assignments in reality largely exceed the obligations I have according to the contract. If you raise your voice, the message that the three months will soon be over, and you will rejoin your unemployed colleagues, is always here. Practically, despite the contract, since the very beginning of my engagement with the media, I am prepared that any day spent there, may be the last one. One can become undesirable very quickly and very easily, with a single text - the colleague is convinced, calling on this own, as well as other journalists' experiences.

With the fixed-term contracts, workers are unable to use other services - for example, to get a credit from a bank.

- My contract is of a one-month duration. This is, in fact, the most painless way for the employers to sack you at any given moment, without any legal consequences to them. That is how they keep the employees on a short leash. By extending the contract month for month, I do not feel protected at work at all. But what is there to be done? There is no choice - you will either accept to work under the conditions of the employer, or you will not work at all - says a journalist from a daily newspaper.

That same newspaper, five or six years ago, offered its journalists employment contracts with a duration of two years. Then it started shortening them to a year. When the management grasped how the other media operated, it decreased them to six months, to now diminish them to one month. At the expiry of that month, each of the employees poses the same question: Will I keep my job for the next 30 days?

- I do not feel protected on any grounds. A case in point is the fact that I work, but I haven't been given a contract. I know that I have been registered as an employee, I checked that at the Pension and Disability Fund. Yet, I do not know whether it is on a fixed-term or permanent basis, since I was not given a contract, nor did I sign anything. Honestly, I do not feel secure enough to even ask to see it. I know that most of my colleagues from the staff also do not have contracts - says a journalist from a television broadcasting news in two languages.

The atmosphere of uncertainty and fear has taken its toll. The journalists, who by default are supposed to be the voice of the repressed, weak, marginalized, are increasingly turning into a dead letter. They remain silent about the injustice inflicted on them, or on others. Consequently, considering how easy it is to lose a job, there are offices where the journalists are very frequently fined if the managerial staff disapproves of their conduct at work in any way. Although the law demands that fines are explained in writing, with legal advice and the right to appeal, many colleagues do not even ask why there has been a deduction from their salary.

“In our newsroom, you only find out that you have been fined for something, after you get the paycheck. No one has ever protested so far, nor sought an explanation, for fear things might get even worse”, an older colleague told us.

IF YOU RAISE
YOUR VOICE,
THE MESSAGE
THAT THE THREE
MONTHS WILL
SOON BE OVER
AND YOU WILL
REJOIN YOUR
UNEMPLOYED
COLLEAGUES,
IS ALWAYS HERE

The labour inspectors never enter the media

Although the fixed-term contracts are the shortest way to get an employee laid-off, as if this is not enough for the employers, they get involved in transgressions in order to make layoffs even easier and cut down their obligations to the employees. There are cases like this: if it was a one-year long, fixed term contract, instead of extending it for the same duration with an annex, it is not extended, although, in fact

the employee keeps working, and the employer registers him/her at the Employment Agency for a shorter period of time. Thus, they create conditions to terminate the worker's employment more easily. This became possible after the Employment Agency made a decision not to require submission of the contracts, which would indicate the will of the workers.

Labour inspectors last year did not enter media offices to determine whether the journalists were given lawfully prescribed employment contracts, or to see whether the owners were violating the Law on Labour Relations. They only acted against the violation of labour rights in the portal komunikacija.mk, whose owner was convicted for fraud. Inspectors determined that he cheated on the journalists from the portal and failed to give them salary. In the monthly reports, published on the web-site of the State Labour Inspectorate (the last one is for November 2013), it can be seen that labour inspectors carried out a total of 2,950 inspection

supervisions in various companies, yet none of them is media.

The victories of journalists over their employers, fought out in the courtroom are little in number, but serve as hope that justice can be achieved. The legal department of the Union of Journalists has received seven reactions of journalists with fixed-term employment contracts. Five court disputes have been registered, three of which were of employees in a cable television, where the fixed-term employment contracts were being crossed over and remade and then presented as permanent employment contracts. Two of them are cases of employees working in a television station with national concession, who had fixed-term employment contracts without clearly stated dates of signing, which was a direct breach of Article 14, paragraph 3 of the Law on Labour Relations. In two cases, employees had their fixed-term employment contracts terminated before the expiry of the deadline, but they estimated that it did not pay off to drag around in courts. The workers from the cable television won the disputes, apart from one, for whom we are waiting for the Appellate Court to confirm the part stating that the workers should go back to work. The cases of the two employees from a national television station ended up with an extrajudicial procedure in which the management recognized the grounds for lawsuit and paid reimbursement to the damage.

Our colleague from the introduction to the text will not sue the television station, although there are grounds for a lawsuit. It is not worth in financial terms, according to the assessment she made, which is also the logic behind other journalists' decisions who quit the quest for justice for similar reasons. For example, if the journalist was registered with a fixed-term contract, and the employment was terminated two months before the contract expired, and manages to prove that the dismissal was ungrounded, the compensation for damage s/he would get would be in the amount of the payment due for those two months. And if they lose the dispute, the costs payable for the procedure would start from 25,000 MKD upwards, up to two thousand EUR for the more complex cases. And if they have taken remuneration on any grounds, that money would also be subtracted from the compensation for damage. In the end, it turns out that the compensation for damage would be a really small amount of money, or nothing at all. It seems that the lawsuit only serves the purpose of moral satisfaction, proving that one has been unlawfully dismissed. Ironically, the employer even gets a reward, since they will not pay the compensation for damage.

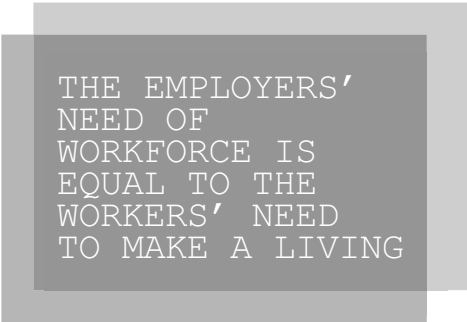
Existential uncertainty

The more alarming the situation with the fixed-term contracts in the media gets, the more the fear to talk on this subjects sets in. The fact that all the statements here are anonymous - those of the people who have lost their jobs, as well as those of the ones who are daily under pressure that their boss may not extend their contract - serves to prove that.

Radivojevic Milenkova advises the workers to insist on permanent employment contracts.

- Here, we can talk more about existential uncertainty than about legal uncertainty, yet the worker, by accepting the fixed-term contract, agrees to this. That is why I believe that when negotiating for a job, workers need to make more efforts to push the employer

into signing a permanent employment contract with them, and not to immediately agree to the offers given to them by the employer. The employers' need of workforce is equal to the workers' need to make a living. Hence, when negotiating for a job, workers must see themselves as a relevant factor and make efforts to sign permanent employment contracts, which would grant them more certainty - she says.



THE EMPLOYERS'
NEED OF
WORKFORCE IS
EQUAL TO THE
WORKERS' NEED
TO MAKE A LIVING

What is the difference in the two types of contracts? The same provisions from the Law on Labour Relations apply to the fixed-term employment contract as the ones for the permanent employment contract (as regards to the types of dismissals), with the difference that the fixed-term contract expires after the time of duration of the contract runs out. The employers are limited solely with the final deadline until which they may extend these type of contracts, which is five years. More specifically, if a worker was signing fixed-term contracts within a period of 5 year, afterwards their contract should be automatically transformed in a permanent employment contract. If this does not happen, the employee may sue the employer.

However, not even this provision is firm guarantee, since it is written in such a way that it leaves space for anyone to interpret it as they see best suited. This has been confirmed by labour inspectors.

There is no legal protection for the fixed-term employees, other than this provision. However, even this one is confusing and suspicious. Therefore, we have witnessed different practices of employers and courts. There are different rulings for the same case. And it is not completely clear to us how to advise the employees. Most usually, we send them to court - they say from the Labour Inspectorate.

According to the labour inspectors, in the private sector, fixed-term contracts are most often signed with new employees, the ones that employers are not certain whether they would keep. In the state sector, they are most frequent in education, and are subsequently transformed into permanent employment contracts.

The Confederation of Employers say that the company's practice is to employ season workers, or part-time workers for a fixed term. The other employee are permanently hired. According to this, it turns out that the fixed-term employment is most frequent in the media exactly.

Only collective protection can fend off insecure jobs

In a situation when there is an evident tendency of employers to define employment in general as fixed-term employment increasingly more, and the competent institutions are inert or even supportive of the trend of changes in the Law on Labour Relations which constantly increases the allowed permit for fixed-term employment, media employees are left with no other option but to get self-organized.

Not individually, but only as a group with strength and solidarity can they apply pressure on the employees to extend or replace the fixed-term employment contracts, with permanent employment.

At the same time, the unions are the ones that can also generate public pressure which would lead to changes in the laws and deadlines allowed for fixed-term employment. The threat from such pressure seems to be more recognized by the employers themselves than employees, and consequently any activities bearing potential of a union aspect are considered to be highest form of disobedience and are urgently sanctioned.

Biljana Bogdanovska

This story raises the burning issue faced by a huge number of Macedonian workers, especially those from the journalist-media branch, which is the so-called impermanent job, i.e. “temporary employment”, or as it has been defined in the Law on Labour Relations (2005), this phrase would refer to all those who have signed temporary employment contracts. The essential characteristic of this type of labour-legal contract is that according to all theoretical and legal parameters, it falls under the category of “atypical employment contracts”, meaning that in a normal legal system its occurrence should be the exception rather than the norm! However, in our country this is one of the most frequently abused instruments in labour law, since it fits the employers perfectly - because, only in this case, they are not bound to provide a written explanation for possible future non-extension of the contract, i.e. its validity period stops by virtue of law simply with the expiry of its deadline and from the next day on, the person who had a job until just a few hours ago, becomes unemployed. It is symptomatic that this type of employment contract, as years pass by, instead of becoming less frequently used legally - it becomes more widely used?! In the

1990s it was anticipated that this type of unconventional contract can only be made in four explicitly stated situations, which conditionally - according to the principle of a closed list (numerus clausus) - could be characterized as “irregular”,¹ while today it can be made for the performance of all usual “regular things”, actually for the same cases for which it would be more recommendable and more reasonable to make a permanent

employment contract. Thus, in the period up to 2003, the maximum allowed period of time in which it was possible to work under this type of agreement was one year, whereby this contract would have been automatically transformed into the more favorable permanent employment contract. Later on this deadline was raised to three years! However, the tendency for unfavorable legal changes did not stop here, and hence, in 2005 - the deadline was extended to four, and then since 2008 onwards, it reached its maximum duration in history, a period of as many as five years!

Because of this, in future, the unions and their alliances would have to apply stronger public pressure on the authorities, in order to get the initial deadline of one year which applied in the first years after Macedonia’s independence - in order to avoid the all too frequent abuse of this specialized labour-law instrument.

LEGAL COMMENT

¹ Covering the following: (1) season work - not more than nine months within a calendar year; (2) increased volume of work - not longer than six months in the course of one year; (3) replacement of an absent employee - in the course of the absence; and (4) work on a specific project - until its completion [Art. 23, LoLr/1993]



Discriminated in every aspect

Without the necessary equipment for uninterrupted performance of their working assignments, paid nearly twice less compared to the journalists in the newsrooms, working seven days a week, and without regulated terms of service. This how we can briefly summarize the working conditions of the correspondents in Tetovo, as well as the other towns in the country.

THE CORRESPONDENTS
FROM THE INTERIOR
OF THE COUNTRY
ARE "SECOND-CLASS
JOURNALISTS"
IN MACEDONIA

The reporters working for television stations do not have cameras to use when needed, so the correspondents for different television stations share the same camera. The journalists in print media are not given photo-cameras to use, although photographs are required with every text. In the past photographers were hired to go out on field together with the correspondents, but this is no longer a practice. For example, only a few of the 60 journalists and media workers, which is as

many as there are in Tetovo, take a salary equal or higher than the average pay on national level. The salaries of all the others are much lower. In order to manage to get income of about 20,000 MKD at the end of the month, they need to work for two to three media at the same time, but only a few manage to do this.

150 MKD per text

One of our interviewees is a journalist with huge, nearly 50-year-long working experience. In his career so far he has worked for a local radio-station and a few print media outlets. He is still active as a correspondent. He runs his archive in which he keeps precise and neat

records of court rulings that he wrote about, sessions of the local government, and a notebook with contacts, arranged according to their place of living.

He has a pricelist for his work, and he gets remuneration only for the published texts, so that, depending on the newsroom, short news are paid 150-250 MKD, while topics from 600 to 1000 MKD. However, most of the published news are charged as short news.

This pace of work imposed on him takes its toll, primarily on the quality. The biggest problem, as he says, is when due to lack of coordination, the office will send him to report about an event, and then they will not publish the text.

He concludes that both in the past, in the previous system, as well as today, the correspondents have worked in equally bad conditions. The conditions are far from decent, and incomparably worse than the conditions provided for journalists in editorial offices.

- We, the correspondents, are like the appendices to the editorial offices. Seldom do they invite us at New Year's or other parties. In these 12 years that I have worked for this newspaper, they have invited me to a party only once. They treat us as second class journalists, we do not have the same treatment and our production is equal, if not larger, he points out.

- Although the conditions I work in do not even closely resemble those of my colleagues in Skopje, monthly I publish about 60 articles. Unlike them, who specialize in covering a certain sector, we, the correspondents, report about all daily affairs, ranging from sports matches all the way to the sessions of the local government, and at the same time we also work on reportages and opinion pieces. I do my writing on a typewriter, and the office has never asked me whether I need paper, a Dictaphone or other stationary. Not to mention the every-day costs such as fuel or vehicle depreciation, he says, and adds that it often comes to pass that his costs are higher than the remuneration for the published text.

Another journalist, with 24 years of professional experience, only nine of which have been recognized as professional service, emphasizes that from his experience so far, the biggest problem when working as a freelancer is that one has employment contract, and no regulated years of service. He also uses his own vehicle when doing his every-day tasks. He has also worked for both print media and television. In both cases the editorial offices gave him neither a camera, nor a photo-camera.

Three assignments for a single remuneration

A cameraperson with slightly more than 18 years of working experience in local and national televisions, pinpoints several problems

that he has faced in this career so far. Apart from recording footage, he is also required to act as an editor and a driver, and hence, he emphasized, the office gets three workers for a single salary. He divides problems into those of technical and those of financial nature. For the past two years he has been using his own camera because the one they gave him from the television broke down.

- And the repair or purchase of a new camera happens to last for more than two years. The editor tells us: make do with what you have, and the technical director on the other hand, advises me to buy my own camera and work with it, just like taxi drivers do. Expenditures, depreciation, camera, computer, internet, tapes, I need to buy all of these things from my salary, which is far lower than the average salary on national level, he says.

According to him, his colleagues from Skopje, apart from not having this type of problem, also get salaries that are twice higher for work of equal quality. After haggling for some time, borrowing cameras from his colleagues, he was forced to borrow money to buy his own camera.

- They demand from us to be ready to work at any given moment during night or day, and they refuse to provide with at least the basic means for work. All the things I use at the moment are mine, nothing belongs to the TV station. My camera, tripod, cables, computer for editing, internet, a vehicle and many

other things, he concludes.

Also, it is a major problem that the TV stations would not pay for depreciation of the vehicles, and are up to several months late when it comes to refunding the money for fuel. They pay them 600 MKD for each 100 kilometers, and any possible repairs to the vehicle are at the correspondent's own cost.

According to him, the correspondents working solely for national media are having the hardest time. He emphasizes that when he was working in the newsroom in a local television there was no need for him to go out to cover and film and with his own vehicle, nor pay for fuel out of his own money or be forced to buy a camera. Yet, when he started working as a freelancer, all of these problems came to the surface. Apart from being forced to personally provide all the technical means for work, he had to do the assignments usually allocated to three employees - a cameraperson, footage editor and driver.

- I remember an incident which would most vividly depict the rudeness of editors and our powerlessness. I was supposed to go shoot

WE, THE
CORRESPONDENTS,
ARE LIKE
APPENDICES TO
THE EDITORIAL
OFFICES.
SELDOM DO THEY
INVITE US AT
NEW YEAR'S OR
OTHER PARTIES

in Mavrovo, and I had not been refunded the costs for fuel and pay-toll for more than four months. The editor first called the colleague that I work with, and then me. As soon as she called, I said that I couldn't go outside of Tetovo since I didn't have any money for fuel. Before I finished, she just told me: "you have to go out on field" and she hung up. Half an hour later she called to check whether we had gone out on field, and once again I repeated that I didn't have any money for fuel. This time, she listened to all I had to say, and when I finished, she accused me of not wanting to do my job, and hung up. After some time she called for the third time, to tell me that half of the overdue money was paid. I answered that I would immediately go to the bank to take out the money, and then head straight to the petrol station to get my tank full. Before she hung up she told me she was certain that money was not the problem. "You don't want to do your job", she said - our interviewee tells us.

According to him, all of this negatively influences his motivation for work. He emphasizes that if there is one thing he has learned so far, is that the more he tries, the more he gets molested. Furthermore, he says that it is a major problem that they do not have days-off. Although there really are no events every day, they must always be on stand-by, ready to go out on field, which is why they are unable to plan anything, since they cannot predict when there would be, and when there wouldn't be any daily events to cover.

- We are always working, and if we need to take a day-off, we have to arrange some of the co-camerapersons from other TV-stations to cover for us on that day, he says.

Quantity instead of quality

A younger journalist, with 12 years of working experience, who, apart from one local and one national TV-stations, also works for a newspaper, a radio and an internet-page, emphasizes that the national television that he works for does not offer him any technical conditions, but they at least do not ask for too much.

- At the local TV they tell us, do as much work as the conditions will allow you. This attitude also affects our remuneration, since the local television stations takes part of the remuneration as recompense for the technical devices we use. I must work for three media to be able to earn a good average salary, he says.

According to him as well, one of the main problems is that he does not have a day off. He emphasizes that he needs to be ready to go out on field at any given day of the week.

- Depending on the media, the treatment of correspondents may vary, be somewhat better or worse. Yet, they mainly see us as external contributors, and not as part of the team. Hence, while running after

quantity, the quality of the final product is often affected, he concludes at the end of our conversation.

A former journalist with seven years of working experiences emphasizes that the bad conditions for work, the low salary and lack of prospects for the future are the main reasons why he has stopped working as a journalist.

- The conditions were bad. I bought my own voice recorder, and they only gave us a single tape during the entire period when I was there - he says.

Now he works in a completely different area, where, as he says, he has not more problems of technical nature in the performance of his working tasks.

WE ARE ALL
"FREELANCERS" AND
IT ALL DEPENDS ON
HOW GOOD A DEAL
YOU WILL MANAGE
TO STRIKE AND
BARGAIN FOR.
WE HAVE NO
GUARANTEED RIGHTS

A younger colleague with eight years of experience in television and internet journalism, emphasizes that he has not faced problems, since he works for a local television station which provides him with a camera, vehicles and other necessary technical means for work. His biggest problem is that he is not insured, he works as a free-lancer on contract, and also has a problem with the days-off.

- We are all "freelancers" and it all depends on how good a deal you will manage to strike and bargain for. We have no guaranteed rights, he is decisive.

A journalist with seven years of working experience in television and radio, says that from technical perspective, working for a television station is the most difficult. While she was in a radio they gave her a recorder, and it had all been much easier, but now she works for a local TV station, where apart from her there is another correspondent for a national TV stations, and they share the same camera.

- We are a total of five journalists and two camerapersons, and we share a single camera. When we need to arrange a shooting, priority is given to the local television station, and we come next. Since I don't have my own camera, I am unable to schedule a shooting when I can, or when I want to, nor plan certain stories which take more time to prepare. This entire situation badly affects me and my work. I don't even know whether I can complain, ask for help, and to be honest, I do not even see a way out of the present situation, she says.

Her contract is as follows. She works for the local television for free, which in return gives her the camera to use, and she is solely paid by the national station which only pays remuneration for her, which is as little as 600 MKD per broadcasted story. They do not pay for the

cameraperson, or the editor, they provide no funding for transport and other costs. Her colleague, with whom they share the sole camera from the local television, has seven years of working experience for TV, radio, internet and a newspaper.

- I haven't been provided with anything by the national television that I work for. Nothing. No telephone, no camera, no tripod, no microphone, no vehicle, no laptop or computer to do the editing. They rarely ever recognize the costs, and we must pay for everything from our salary. Because of all of this, one is unable to do one's best and instead of thinking about the article, how to creatively conceive it, do research and have information on it before going out on field, I have to organize everything. Arrange the camera, provide transport, schedule meeting the speakers. Previously, in the television I used to work for before, and has now closed down, they gave us a small handycam, but now I am expected to provide the technical resources on my own. Creativity is lost in arranging things, he maintains. In spite of not providing even minimal means for work, the editors nearly always locate the guilt for the unduly finished tasks solely in the correspondents, and do not accept excuses of technical nature.

His cameraperson and editor, who has two years of experience, also works for a local and national television, says that they are unable to meet the working assignments on time due to the lack of camera. They also shoot for the local television from which they use the technical means, and the national one which pays them a fee.

- We are unable to finish all the assignments, and this frustrates us, although we are trying to be extremely professional, he says.

An editor at a local station, with 27 years of professional journalist experience in all media platforms, says that the television used to be much better equipped in the past, but as time passes, the equipment depreciates, and there are no funds to buy new things.

This situation leads to problems and affects the coverage of events. We are unable to cover some of the topics, while the selection of what we run, and we don't run, is very strict. Often, we have to exchange footage with other television stations, or teams of correspondents, in order to be able to cover as many events as possible, she emphasizes.

Insisting on anonymity

It is also indicative that all of the journalists who accepted talking on this subject, insisted on staying anonymous. It is difficult to get them to talk, since as they say, they do not believe anything would change in near future.

Ilcho Cvetanovski

Such substandard conditions for work that the correspondents from the interior of the country are exposed to in Macedonia, defy the basic human right to decent work. This important economic and social right is guaranteed with the most significant international legal acts, conventions and declarations recognized in civilized societies. Namely, on this occasion we shall point out that in these cases there is direct violation of several crucial articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹(1948) adopted by the United Nations of which the Republic of Macedonia has been a full-fledged member since 1993. For example, the UDHR, among other things, states that "everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his/her personality (Art.22); and also, it is guaranteed that "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for him/herself and his/her family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection" (Art.23). Furthermore, it is expressly proclaimed that "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay." (Art.24); and finally, that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the

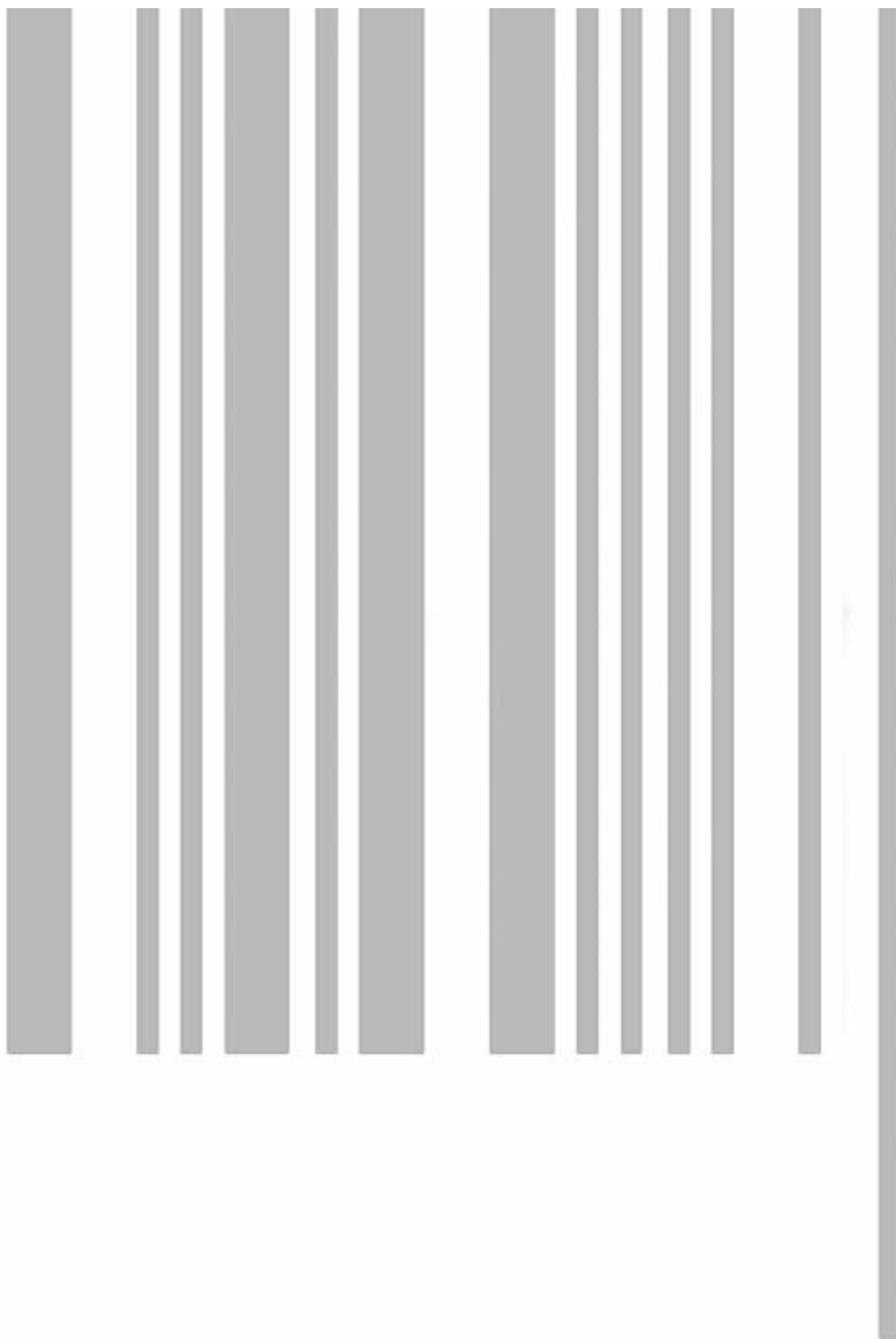
LEGAL COMMENT

health and well-being of him/herself and of her/his family..." (Art. 25). It is also significant that none of the provisions of this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein (Art.30).²

In future, we should find a way how to include these correspondents into the legal "labour market". This, in accordance with the existing labour law regulations, would be done in such a way that the media which have national concession would be bound, as a prerequisite to obtaining their concession, to have signed some of the existing types of employment contracts, provided in the existing LoLR (for example - part-time job contract); part-time job contract with several employers - so-called double employment; work from home contracts, etc).

¹ UDHR was adopted in years shortly after the end of the Second World War, and was proclaimed with the UN Resolution 217 A (III) by the General Assembly, on the 10th December 1948. You may access the text on this link http://www.dados.org/mzd/Menschenrechte/grundkurs_mr2/Materialien/dokument1.htm.

² Similar provisions are also contained in the: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) of the OUN; furthermore The European Social Charter (1961) of the Council of Europe and its Supplements i.e. annexes, as well as the Additional Protocols (1988 + 1991 + 1995 + 1998); as well as the European Charter of Fundamental Rights of the UE.



■ An army of journalists are forced to work on "the black market"

Freelancers, contract work, copyrighted work contracts, internship contracts... are only some of the ways in which media employers label the formal cover-up for the wide-spread habit of depriving media workers from their basic rights according to the Law on Labour Relations.

Formally and legally these people are unemployed, but in practice they are bound to spend full working hours on the premises of the employer, often they are banned from working with other media, and they are deprived of the essential security provided by the employment contract which they would be entitled to considering the way in which they are hired by the employer.

They are expected to work eight hours a day, as if they were permanently employed. These journalists are paid neither healthcare, not pension insurance, and in order to keep their "salaries" paid as

remunerations, they are forced to work on weekends, and sometimes even on holidays, while annual holidays or sick-leaves are only abstract nouns for most of them.

This trend among media employers of by-passing the Law on Labour Relations and manipulating the possibilities for internships or freelance work, as well as the Law on Copyright, which grants the possibility of cooperation by means of copyrighted work, has led to an army of journalists who are de facto working illegally "on the black market". Many of them, despite the decade-long engagement as freelancers, do not have a single day of registered professional service.

THE NUMBER OF THE SO-CALLED "PERMANENT FREELANCERS" IN THE MEDIA HAS UNDERGONE STEADY GROWTH

Happy to be paid their remuneration

Overjoyed to have at least some monthly income, most of the journalists with this type of contracts keep silent and although they are “freelancers” or have signed a copyrighted work contract, they work as if they are regularly employed.

A journalist in a daily newspaper, who wished to stay anonymous due to understandable reasons, says that although he has been working in the newsroom for nearly five years, the last time he saw a contract was about two years ago.

- Until then I signed monthly contracts for copyrighted work, which were usually given to all of us to sign by the secretary at the end of the year. Probably the same contract still applies, only I have no information about who signs it, since it is not me. The money is also transferred as royalty payment. The contract stated that the contracting party gets royalty payment for a certain number of texts handed in, the rights for which are transferred to the newspaper. However, since there is no systematization, the remuneration is always the same, for years back - says the journalist.

According to him, although he is not permanently employed, the employers expect from him to do his assignments as if he is a permanent employee. He has equal responsibilities as his permanently employed colleagues, and it is necessary for him to do same working hours as the others, the employed colleagues, although the contract does not envisage any working hours. He tell us that some time ago, he was 20 minutes late for work and he was openly reprimanded, in front of all the colleagues, with the words “do you know what time work starts”.

When he arrives in the morning, just like the regularly employed staff, he is bound to sign the list by 9.30. The most recent example of the (lack of) rights of freelancers, which took place on the premises about a months ago, was when all the employees were sent to a mandatory one-hour course on safety at work, but not the freelancers, as if their safety means nothing at all.

- The health and pension security are an abstract noun for the freelancers. Their sole “privilege” is the paid annual holiday of only ten days, and I wouldn’t know about sick-leaves, since I have never asked for one. The two days during which I was once absent did not affect my remuneration in any way, since there is no way to legally regulate it - the journalist adds.

A journalist in an on-line portal, who also wanted to stay anonymous, says that the copyrighted work contract is commonplace for freelance journalists, especially the ones working in web-portals, and she is one of the people who being paid this way for a few years already.

- I sign a contract for this job once a month, or sometimes every two months, oftentimes with differing content when it comes to my responsibilities, but with the same arranged amount of remuneration. In my previous job, for example, which I had for more than a year, I hadn't signed a contract at all, I was only paid the remuneration, sometimes on my bank account, sometimes in cash. Permanent employment has never even been an option, the excuse is usually that there is no money, it's a time of crisis, there are too many journalists. Hence, the choice I was given at the time was to: either work for nothing, or stay at home without a job - the journalist from the portal says.

Same as her colleagues from the daily newspaper, she is also expected to fulfill the assignments as if she was permanently employed, even much better than those journalists who are so.

- I am not protected by anyone, I sign my contracts month for month, so who could guarantee that next month I will keep my job, unless everything is perfectly done. Regarding the consequences, the contract states that if the job is not properly done, the employer reserves the right not to pay the full amount of remuneration. We work on weekends, we work on holidays. If you want a free weekend you have to find a colleague to replace you, which means that you will have to return the favour the next weekend. At times I have worked without taking a single day off for entire months - the journalist adds.

NO BENEFITS ARE
PAID FOR
"PERMANENT
FREELANCERS",
THEIR INCOME IS
LOWER, THEIR
ASSIGNMENTS EQUAL
OR HIGHER
COMPARED TO THOSE
OF THE EMPLOYEES,
AND THEIR LABOUR
RIGHTS - NON
EXISTENT

She is pessimistic when it comes to settling her employment status, since most of the journalists in the newsroom where she works are unemployed, they get their payment and look for a new job in the meantime.

- The employers say that there is no money, that the payment of the advertising slots is hard, that donors only give them crumbs. In a situation when even the remunerations are low, most of my colleagues are not even thinking about asking for permanent employment. However, the media also pay a heavy toll. Dissatisfied employees won't write excellent texts. Many would say - you only get what you've paid for. That's why the media in Macedonia are as they are - says the journalist from this on-line portal.

Another colleague, who works in another popular on-line portal, also says that none of the journalists working in the newsroom are permanently employed.

- The employer has never given me a guarantee that they will regulate my employment, and the answer that I am most often given is that they do not have money for permanent employment. As far as I know all the colleagues working in my newsroom have signed copyrighted work contracts, i.e. none of them is permanently employed. I have neither health nor pension insurance - this online-journalist says.

In an attempt to settle his status as a freelancer, one colleague agreed to practically work for nothing, and seek financial compensation in additional freelance engagements.

- One year ago, when I turned 40 and realized that none of the competent institutions care about the employment status of employees in private companies, I decided to take matters into my own hands. Thus, I arranged with my boss to pay the remuneration I got as compensation for my work to be paid for insurance. I do not keep a single dime of the money deposited on my account, I give the entire amount back to my boss - our colleague told us.

- Thanks to this, I can now say that for a year back I have had certified professional experience, yet, unfortunately, I do not take a single dime for the work I do in that newsroom. The situation I am in, in my professional area, unfortunately, irritates me more and more with every passing day, which is why I am considering leaving journalism, and I may seriously do so, and then whatever lies ahead may come" he says.

The unbearable ease of layoffs

The main explanation of employers about the freelancers and the other types of informal employments of journalists and media workers is the lack of funds, i.e. the possibility to avoid paying the higher amount of benefits in a situation when the profits in the media business are minimal.

- Certainly, finances are a problem. Especially for portals which are still not that attractive to advertisers, unlike in developed countries. And apart from the advertisements, we do not have many other revenues - subscriptions to portals are still not feasible here. Readers want information for free. Only the pro-government portals have some earnings, since the government advertises there. However, I wouldn't know whether all the employees there have employment contracts and what the amount of their salary would be - says the owner of a popular online portal.

In reality, the presence of freelancers, interns, i.e. journalists hired with copyrighted work contracts, instead of employment contracts is not an occurrence found solely in the media which are barely surviving on the market. It is observed in media with better standing, and even

the public service, although they deny this.

The media editors, those that the journalists often need to talk to about their salaries and progress at their workplace, are skeptical that they have the power to change anything for the better.

- Considering the fact that we truly do have financial difficulties, any discussion of union issues is regarded as extravagance by the owners. The owners have the excuse that this is a way to cut down on the expenses, they not pay the benefits because the newsroom is really in an invidious financial situation” the owner of a print media says.

However, he believes that finances cannot be a sound enough argument for this kind of attitude to the employees.

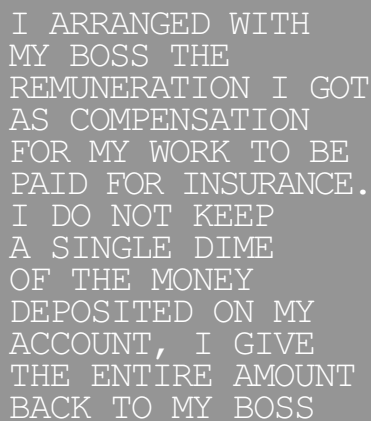
- According to me, there is a possibility to sign employment contracts with all of them; the expenses incurred wouldn't be that much higher compared to the advantages for the employees; and some other costs could be cut down on if a good rationalization was to be carried out in the company - he says.

It is true that apart from the financial benefit to the owners, the freelance status of the people hired by the media gives a chance for quick and sudden dismissals without any problems for the management. The speed and manner in which these decisions are implemented speaks of the lack of moral obligation to the people who have been loyal to their offices for many years.

This can be best illustrated by the case of the summer of 2012 when of the major newspaper publishers decided to “get rid” of the network of correspondents, due to financial reasons. Considering the fact that most of the journalists who were hired as correspondents had freelance status, often without signing any document whatsoever, only a spoken agreement, the company dared, as the dismissed workers claimed, to cancel their engagement with a single text message on their mobile phones.

The effects of such economic and social uncertainty directly affect the quality, as well as integrity of the final product. Journalists who fear that they may easily and quickly lose their payment, do not consider standing up against their superiors who are in charge of their subsistence.

In informal talks, never publicly, they do not hide that they would not dare to write a text which would present any kind of attitude not



I ARRANGED WITH MY BOSS THE REMUNERATION I GOT AS COMPENSATION FOR MY WORK TO BE PAID FOR INSURANCE. I DO NOT KEEP A SINGLE DIME OF THE MONEY DEPOSITED ON MY ACCOUNT, I GIVE THE ENTIRE AMOUNT BACK TO MY BOSS

in line with the editorial policy.

- I know what is permitted and what's not to be published, beforehand. I do not have a contract, and I may be fired at any given moment, hence I do not take too many risks with my texts and I do not go into subjects that I assume the owners would not approve of. Self-censorship definitely works, not only in my case, but in the cases of many of my colleagues", a colleague told us.

Informal employment is illegal

The bad economic conditions which are the reality of the media in Macedonia, especially when it comes to those who do not have access to the funds which under the veil of "government's advertisements" flow into the company's budget, the high supply and low demand on the media market have taken its toll and many of our colleagues do not have any other choice other than to accept this situation for years, up until the moment when the collaboration with them is terminated. At the end they are left without a job, without registered years of professional service, and without any possibility to complain.

The Law on Employment Relations in Macedonia stipulates different sorts of contracts for employment, as many as ten of them, but does not recognize the temporary service contract, and this practice is a violation and a circumvention of the labour law.

"The employer is bound to register all the journalists working regularly, with the obligation to come to work and do all the everyday working assignments, as employees i.e. sign an employment contract with them and register them for mandatory social insurance. There are cases where a certain journalist occurs solely as an author of a certain programme or article, a column or other copyrighted work in which case the relationship between the media and the journalist may be arranged with a copyright contract. There are no other ways to employ workers i.e. they have not been stipulated with the law", emphasized the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

We sought information from the Ministry on which measures are taken to prevent these violations of the law in the media and whether inspections have been carried out in some of media which according to journalists allegedly do not comply with the Law on Labour Relations, but we were not given a detailed answer to these questions.

There, they said that the State Labour Inspectorate always performs controls upon receipt of a complaint by an employee, and that the media are not exempt from this rule.

Nevertheless, practice has proven that this type of informal employment is a frequent and public occurrence in the media business. In fact, all the labour inspectors need to do is to open the publicly available data of the Broadcasting Council of the Republic of

Macedonia which precisely states the structure of employees in the broadcasting industry (television stations and radio stations) and there the entry “freelance status” is duly filled in.

Only to illustrate, the data of the Broadcasting Council on the year of 2012, speaks of the fact that in local televisions, for example, 45% of the total number of hired journalists have a freelance status.

“Their proportion increased by seven percent compared to the previous year”, establishes the Broadcasting Council in the analysis from 2012.

The situation is much worse in regional televisions where the percentage of freelancers is higher than the number of regular employees.

It is interesting to note that if the labour inspection wants to, they can only stick to the body of the law and sanction informal employments, and have done so, but only in a few media houses.

Owner of a local television visited by the labour inspection which required that all freelance employees get contracts, stated that he is surprised by the fact that some of his colleagues, media owners, claim that they do hire freelancers and that the inspectors tolerate this, and even open up vacancy announcements for freelancers, which confirms the selective nature and the double standards when applying the law.

- I do not claim that the Law is good, but I believe that it has to be complied with... and I get irritated by the selective approach of the inspection services which are applying pressure for implementation of the law in some places, and turn a blind eye to others. The system of double standards is appalling here - he says.

There is no legal barrier for pension and health insurance

Apart from regulating these illegal types of employment by making permanent employment contracts with the employees, one other possible solution for mitigation of the problems of “freelancers” in the media would be a change in the laws through which owners would be bound to pay pension and health insurance for paid remunerations as well.

In fact, the occurrence of informal employment is not exclusive only to Macedonia. They, under the joint name of “precariat” are also present in other countries. Yet, unlike Macedonia, the precariate is debated about in Europe, and some of the countries have started recognizing the so-called “indispensable” working rights of the informally employed as well. For example, they are given the right to a notice period, severance, basic social security.

¹ Analysis of the structure of employees in the broadcasting industry 2012
http://www.avmu.mk/images/Analiza_na_strukturata_na_vrabotenite_vo_2012_godina.pdf

Furthermore, the French Law regulating the media situation (Loi Cressard), adopted in the French Parliament in 1974, gives the freelance journalists (so-called „journalistes pigistes“) the status of professional journalists, and recognizes all the labour and professional rights they are entitled to, as well as all the rights contained in the collective agreement between the journalists and employers. It is particularly important to say that the court practice in France systematically provides protection to freelance journalists despite the attempts of publishers to deny them their worker’s rights with the attitude that the “freelance status of the journalist determines the manner in which the income will be paid, but it does not degrade their worker’s rights in any way.”²

It is not by chance that the Charter on the Rights of Freelance Journalists of the International Journalist Federation, insists that the freelancers have the same rights as the permanently employed journalists: the right to a sick-leave, pension insurance, maternity leave, union protection and collective negotiation.³

In Serbia, for example, the employers pay benefits for pension and disability insurance for work done on the basis of temporary service contract. According to the Serbian Law on Health Insurance, the people publishing texts on the basis of temporary service contract, or on the basis of copyright contract, as well as other contracts in which financial compensation is paid for the work performed, are considered physical persons who have mandatory health insurance.

The experts in the area of labour rights say that nothing prevents the state from helping “freelancers” or any other workers with this status of “alternative” employment, and that this only requires political will.

Professor Zdravko Saveski, says that the section of the working class that falls under the category of precariat, or the category of workers with insecure jobs, is on the rise.

- At the moment, the employers only pay the personal tax for these type of remunerations. There is no legal barrier as to why there should not be obligatory payment of benefits and mandatory social insurance for the payments for all alternative types of jobs. This would only require political will and changes in the laws in that direction - Saveski adds.

Kristina Ozimec

² See (« la pige (est) un mode de rémunération et non un contrat particulier, dérogoire au droit du travail" - Conseil de prud hommes de Paris, 9 janvier 2003).

³ Find more at <http://www.ifj.org/en/pages/ifj-efj-freelance-charter>

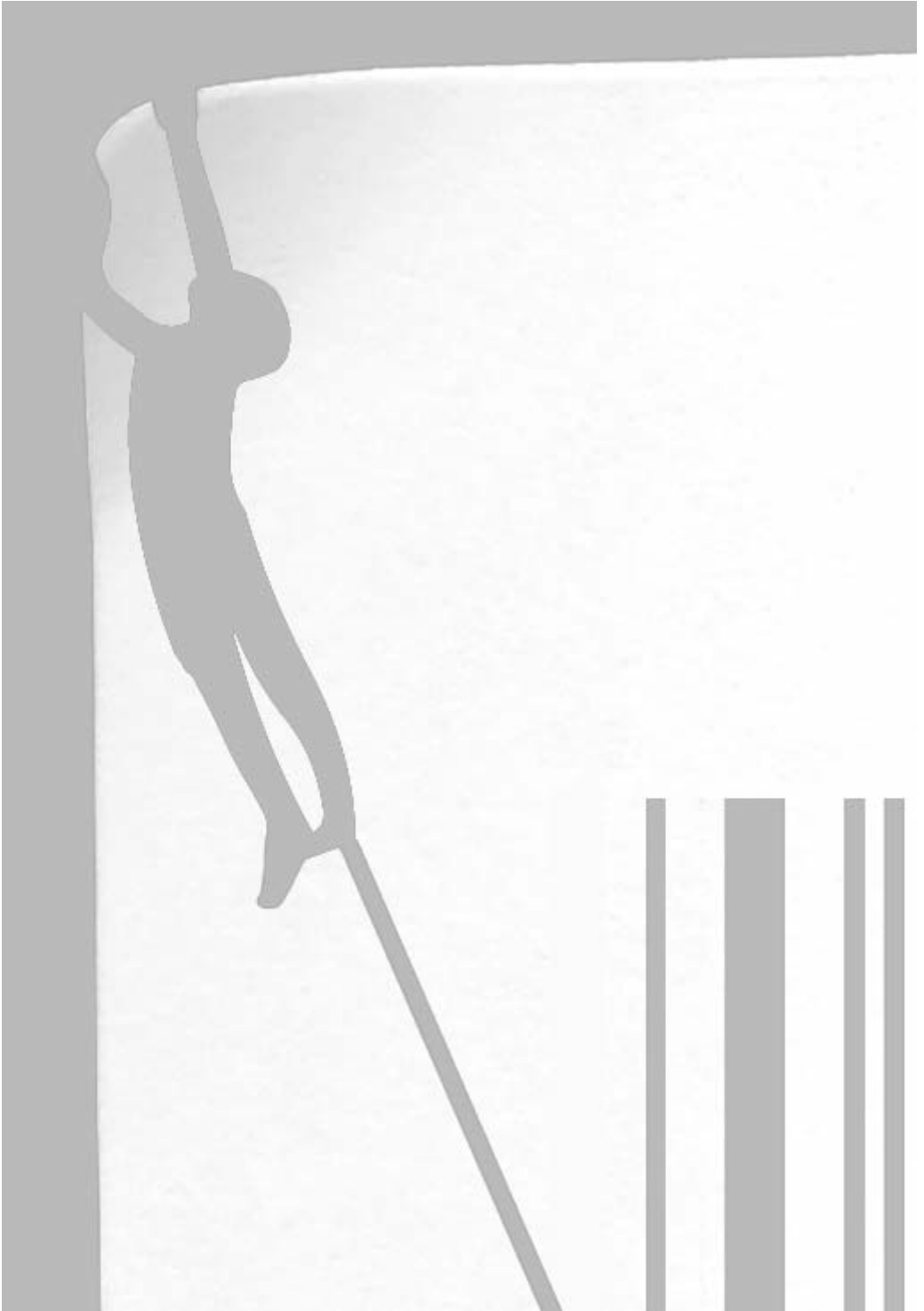
In Macedonian circumstances, the most frequent type of by-passing the regulations from the area of labour relations, is the so-called freelance work. In fact, this "work" is not work in the real sense of the word, because in formal and legal terms these people are not registered as "workers" i.e. according to our positive law they are treated as unemployed people. Another name of this category of "workers" is the title precariat, or, maybe freelancers - which is only a euphemism hiding the cruel everyday reality that this "new class" of our citizens live in. The essential characteristic for them is the insecurity of their make-believe "job". In fact, the Macedonian labour law does not recognize the so-called freelance employment at all! There can be no legal dilemma regarding this. Furthermore, the tendency in the new, and still relevant LoLR was, by introducing a line of new and atypical types of work contracts (for example: fixed employment contracts, internship or voluntary work contracts, work from home contracts, contracts for part time work for one or several employers, contracts for additional work, probation contracts, special contracts for performance of precisely established work etc.) - to impose order on the work done illegally, which apart from being harmful to the workers, is also detrimental to the state, since it tolerates and stimulates the so-called black labour market.

LEGAL COMMENT

However, the implementation of these provisions of the LoLR in our country has not been implemented in practice, and the fault for this can be found mainly in the labour inspectorate and its tolerance for these occurrences, although there are existing legal mechanisms for sanctions. This is due to the fact that this type of mainly low-paid "work" is, in fact, a legal category in the law of obligations, and not labour law! Hence, instead of the Law on Labour Relations (2005),

in these cases they apply the Law on Obligations (2001) or the Law On Copyrights and Related Rights (2010). This, on the other hand, opens a series of other problems faced by these "freelancers": namely, no benefits are paid for them at all; they have no healthcare or pension and disability insurance; they are not registered as employees; no records of professional service are kept for them and they are not entitled to any labour rights or benefits to protect them, on the basis of which they could, for example, initiate a lawsuit in future.

The guidelines on how to overcome this situation, which is already taking up alarming and worrying proportions in our country, is to follow the comparative experiences of other countries and consider the possibility of legal introduction of mandatory benefits for insurance with this type of contracts, in order to discourage employers from abusing the law.



■ Silenced by owners, editors, politicians and resigned to their fate

You have a great story. You have just laid your hands on documents on suspicious tenders. Yes, publishing them would be interesting to the public. However, for who knows what time you decide not to mention it during the morning staff meeting, just to spare yourself from the irritation. The last time you tried to push such a story you lost an hour convincing the editor, who

claimed that its publishing is of no importance, although as a journalist you are aware of the fact that it is. In fact, it is a public secret that the newsroom you work in is close to the ruling structures and that you have no chance to publish anything against the government.

Hence, simply, after a few failed attempts to push critical or investigative subjects, you realize that it is much easier to work on stories which do not tackle anyone in particular.

Consequently, your journalist blade gets blunter with the years, it softens and you even stop noticing those things that trained journalist eye would not have missed back at the time. And it all started as self-censorship.

You leave the major stories to others.

And those "others" are becoming a scarcity in Macedonian journalism. A few journalists from different media who have more than a decade of working experience, claim that instead of public interest, self-censorship has got deep under their skin.

THE JOURNALISTS' TASK IS TO TELL THE TRUTH. YET, THIS UNWRITTEN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE JOURNALISTS AND THE PUBLIC WAS BROKEN A LONG TIME AGO

A silent agreement with oneself

According to definitions, self-censorship is an act of censoring your own work due to fear of consequences.

They hesitate when choosing the topics to address, they omit information because they are aware it will not be published since it is contrary to the interests of certain centres of power. They can count the people they can use as sources on the fingers of one hand, the others are forbidden as undesirable..

A colleague tried to explain how he feels in a single sentence.

- Journalists are under siege. On one side there is the editor-in-chief, on the other the owner, and they are surrounded by the government, advertisers, parties, he says.

From the talks with my colleague I am under the impression that they are forced to cover-up information on daily basis, to turn a "blind eye" on events, to keep silent about topics since it is clear to them that even proposing to write about them would simply not go past the editor's sieve or that if they do get published they may lose their job.

- I practice self-censorship, as a "silent" agreement with myself, due to the uncertainty of my job, i.e. the possibility of losing that job over the most banal of reasons, and even more so, due to the realistic fear that it is very hard, almost impossible, to find another job. I simply do not propose topics about the work of people from the government, because I know that, first of all, they will not be approved, and second, they would not be published - says a journalist with long years of experience in several Macedonian print media.

A colleague who built his career over several decades as a journalist in several national televisions, says that at the moment several media have similar editorial policy which makes it "dangerous" to have topics and articles which could disturb, as he says, "the idyllic" image of the Macedonian society. He claims that the editors, i.e. the first filter before the information reaches the public, do not listen to the journalists at all, unless their proposals for work are suitable to them. In this way, in fact, our colleague explains, they make it clear to them that their topics are not worth publishing, which, on the other hand, triggers self-censorship.

- The angle of perspective is definitely narrowed down, for the simple reason that, almost without exception, you are aware that if you propose the broadest possible angle, you will not even be heard, let alone allowed to debate your arguments on why you think that subject is relevant. The selection of speakers is also a "sore spot"... There are desirable and undesirable ones. Since

they are unable to withstand the battle on who needs to provide insight and why, they take the easy way out, by saying "let's leave that for some other time" or similar excuses - the journalist says.

A journalist who has covered topics from the area of foreign policy for a long time, claims that nowadays it is not easy at all to prose and finish a text.

- Yes, I am subject to self-censorship, first when proposing the topics, but most of all when it comes to the speakers and the angle, since there is a sort of a "ban" on certain (and not a few) speakers - this journalist claims.

Another journalist in print media explains his personal methodology based on which he comes up with the topics.

- On daily basis, the selection of ideas that I myself censor, arises from the discussions with the editors I have worked with. For example, if at some previous meeting they gave me argument, or quasi arguments against some of my proposals, or if they have openly told me that it is not in the newsroom's interest to write about it, naturally, in the period to follow I would not propose anything similar, until I am able to sense that there has been a change in atmosphere and that there are fewer restrictions to ideas - says our colleague.

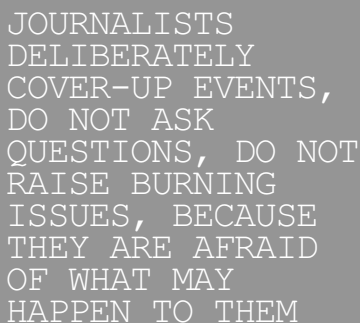
PH: Never been like this before

Macedonian journalism has never been free from censorship and self-censorship, yet all of our interviewees agree that it has never been like this before. The most frequently mentioned reason as to why journalists have this feeling exactly now, is the fear of losing their job, which, due to the circumstances on the labour market, is hard to find.

From my 13 years of experience, I can say that I have never had such a bitter feeling that self-censorship and censorship are all around us, and that we, as a guild, are unable to fend them off - says a colleague with long years of professional experience in print media.

She is not alone in this judgement.

- Although self-censorship is a mark of Macedonian journalism for the entire period of pluralist Macedonia (here I also count the period of 3-4 years before the 8 September 1991, which, if compared to nowadays, is a period of "Scandinavian" journalism - according to the extent of democracy and freedom)... There



JOURNALISTS
DELIBERATELY
COVER-UP EVENTS,
DO NOT ASK
QUESTIONS, DO NOT
RAISE BURNING
ISSUES, BECAUSE
THEY ARE AFRAID
OF WHAT MAY
HAPPEN TO THEM

were also other dark periods - I would emphasize the one from the year of war - 2001, when everyone got caved in into their ethnical fortress, but definitely, what is happening today is, so to say, the darkest period... - told us a colleague who is now working for an on-line portal.

According to Zhaneta Trajkovska from the School on Journalism, Macedonian journalism has never been free from self-censorship, since it has always come hand in hand with political and economic pressures of the local magnates and editorial offices, with economic insecurity of journalists, with twisted ethical codes and with underestimation of journalism, which in fact is supposed to be the reflection of democracy in a given society.

- It seems that in our country it actually is a reflection of the processes taking place in Macedonia - submissive minds, fear of the everyday life, bureaucratization of all the political relations and bombing the public with unimportant, devoid of any essence, and marketing-processed news which are carbon copied by at least a dozen of media" she says.

Fear of punishment, dismissal and even imprisonment

"Journalists shall publish correct, certified information and shall not conceal essential information and force document. Journalists shall comply with the laws in the country, but shall not publish or conceal anything which is contrary to the public interests" are the basic rules of the guild, contained in the Code of Conduct of Journalists in Macedonia.

Nevertheless, a large number of media keep silent about entire events on daily basis. As if they did not take place. Journalist teams cover them, take statements, and then there is no word about it in the newsroom. Some of the colleagues that we talked with tell us that it is very commonplace for them to attend a press-conference, and then be told at the office that the event will go uncovered. And they don't protest. Professional integrity for many is a luxury they cannot afford.

Thus, a colleague lost her job due to pressures to accept the editor's viewpoint when preparing the subject on a highly-relevant issue, which was contrary to hers.

- After I had no job for months, I realized that at bad times like these for journalism, it might be better not to be very provocative, since it is a battle that's impossible to win individually. The best you can do is quit your job, which is not a solution" she says.

In a situation when the labour market is satiated with supply,

and with the closing down of the media and their economic vulnerability, the demand is increasingly lower and to lose your job means to be left without any possibility for any long-term engagement.

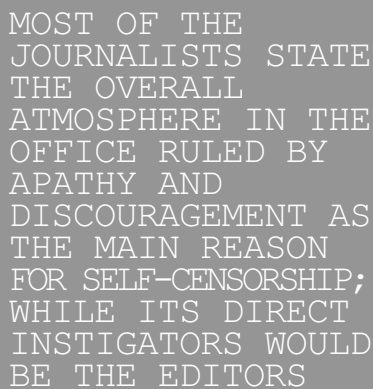
The economic uncertainty and social security are not the only reasons why journalists are forced into "not being too provocative".

The fact that in Macedonia, a journalist such as Tomislav Kezharovski ended up behind bars for a published text which allegedly revealed the identity of a protected witness, sends a very strong and clear message that the consequences of writing for a certain political, business or other mogul may be even worse than losing a job.

The fear of a lawsuit for damaged reputation, which may inflict a fine of thousands Euros for the journalist, editor and owner, also plays its role.

- Everyone has their reputation and no one should slander or offend without due punishment. However, the problem is that in a judiciary system such as ours, which almost always rules in favour of the political moguls from the government or the businesspersons close to the government, i.e. in case of absence of independent legal apparatus, it is logical that both journalists and editors, as well as media owners, are afraid that if they write anything against a mogul, they might be forced to pay

high compensations - a newsroom editor comments.



MOST OF THE
JOURNALISTS STATE
THE OVERALL
ATMOSPHERE IN THE
OFFICE RULED BY
APATHY AND
DISCOURAGEMENT AS
THE MAIN REASON
FOR SELF-CENSORSHIP;
WHILE ITS DIRECT
INSTIGATORS WOULD
BE THE EDITORS

Self-censorship as an efficient replacement of censorship

Most of the journalists state the overall atmosphere in the office ruled by apathy and discouragement as the main reason for self-censorship, while its direct instigators would be the editors, most often the editors-in-chief, who, as they claim, have been placed on their positions by the centers of power to pressure the journalists into working within the clearly defined lines. This means that not a single topic which would be deemed undesirable by several structures can go past this first filter.

- They are all connected by this indestructible synergy: - the owner depending on the government because it may not direct its advertising money towards its media or suggest to another

centre of economic power to skip the newsroom in question when distributing the money for marketing and PR. And it is not small money we are talking about - but amounts of millions. Certainly, Euros... And when you take a look at all of this from a different, some may even say objective, perspective - it becomes clear how a single centre practically tailors the editorial policy of over 90 percent of the media - tells us a colleague.

Another colleague, on the other hand, says that she doesn't know who is behind the feeling she gets, but is aware of who pushes it on her the most.

Mainly because of the editor, since, according to my previous experience, he is the main obstacle to most of the topics I have been proposing - my colleague says.

Another colleague explains to us that there are no specific prohibitions coming from anywhere, but that it is clearly understood what may, and what may not be done.

- You simply know which topics you can cover and which government officials you are allowed, and which you are not allowed to write about. Not even the editor has ever set an overt prohibition - yet each of the journalists is aware what is the orientation of the media they work for, and the directions they need to take - the journalist says.

The division of journalists into "patriots" and "traitors", imposed by daily politics also plays its role, as well as the ease with which journalists writing contrary to the expectations of the political elites are slandered. Therefore, our colleagues become inert and believe that any topic critical of the Government or any of its moves, would in fact be pro-opposition and if they do write about it, they would be given the label of "sorosoids" . Actually, that is why they refuse to do research, pose provocative questions, critically observe the work of institutions.

The editors who claim that they also feel self-censorship, interpret this occurrence with various reasons.

An editor with three decades of experience says that the presence of self-censorship in editorial offices is undisputable, and the reasons are multifold. He says that even the perception of the newsroom as a "serious one" contributes to an editorial policy of avoiding certain topics such as corruption scandals. The second reason is the image of the so-called state-owned media, keeping up with the government, which according to some should nourish patriotic journalism. Crossing the lines of this perception triggers consequences; hence, when editing the newspaper he recognizes self-censorship, although he find the reasons for it to be ungrounded.

- It is not disputable that journalists are also just ordinary people and may be patriotic, but patriotism must not serve as an excuse for the media or the journalists not to cover, or not to write about the corruption affairs.

According to him, an equally influential reason are the business interests of the owner, which are indispensably tied to politics.

- Despite the fact that the owner has never personally applied pressure, nor called in person, or sent messages regarding the editorial policy, it is a fact that there are certain areas which are tacitly understood to be of direct interest to the owner and that those topics are not to be raised. Fortunately, there are not many of them - says the editor.

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO SEE JOURNALISM AS PROPAGANDA AND WHO BELIEVE THAT IT IS QUITE NATURAL FOR THEM TO CARE ABOUT THE INTERESTS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES, THE OWNER, OR SOME THIRD PARTY, AND NOT THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Self-censorship as an excuse for lack of professionalism?

However, contrary to these experiences of journalists, there are also editors who complain that despite the fact that they give the journalists topics to write on, they refuse to do so. Under the excuse that the topic is disputable and may cause them problems, they hide their inertia, since it is a bit more difficult for them to investigate a topic, claims an editor that we talked to.

- Censorship, i.e. the presumed censorship in the media they work for, is more of an excuse. Like, even if I write this, my editor, or editor-in-chief would

not run it, so it's not worth bothering, i.e. investigating, whereas, in fact, it is only looking for excuses not to do research on the topic. That's not self-censorship, but non-professionalism - says the editor.

Additional problem is that in the offices there are people who see journalism as propaganda, and who believe that it is quite natural for them to care about the interests of the political parties, the owner, or some third party, and not the public interest. Consequently, some colleagues ignore certain news, events and information.

Simply, they pretend as if nothing happened if the news is connected to the political or business-competitors of their owner, even when the owners themselves do not suffer any damage from the publishing.

Trajkoska also believes that most of the journalists have come to terms with their role of spokespersons of politics, the ruling parties and the opposition, the business moguls, the debased intellectual elite, and all of those from whom, as she says, they may get something in return, or who may affect their so-called career.

Responsibility and labour rights as weapons against self-censorship

Experience has shown that unlike censorship, which is visible, direct and paid for expensively by a repressive state apparatus, self-censorship is much more dangerous and slyer, as well as more efficient. Its presence serves to prove that there is still no professional responsibility in Macedonian journalism and that it is directly dependent on the political and business centers of power.

- In circumstances like this, we are no longer even talking about self-censorship or comprehensive and professionally processed information which is supposed to communicate the reality to the citizens and give them enough space to draw their own conclusions. The level has been lowered - this is a stage of subservient minds and crushed spirits, and there is almost no journalism, - says Zhaneta Trajkoska.

She is not optimistic at all that things may take a turn for the better. She believes that the journalists' efforts to maintain the professional standards will die out, since there is no sound basis to build them upon.

Yet, regardless of the pessimism, it is clear that self-censorship as a sore-point of journalism, must be replaced with responsibility and professionalism. Self-regulation, as defence of the public, as well as the guild from the bad and unprofessional journalism, is part of the solution.

Certainly, this would not be possible if journalists continue working in insecure working conditions. Only decently paid journalists who are not afraid that they may be fired at any given moment, fined for offence of even worse, detained, would be able to abide by the main principle of the profession - to tell the truth.

Frosina Dimeska

Just as Tacko Lokvenec skillfully remarks in his book *News and Authorities* "there is a fact that, in countries where freedom of the press is widespread, certain important things may not be read publicly, since the newspapers are so free that they simply do not publish "those things". Hence, even one's own voluntary confinement out of interest may be and is called freedom"! This leads us to a conclusion that the problem of self-censorship is one of the most complex in modern journalism, especially because of the fact that it is not perceived as a problem at all, but as something that only comes naturally. What is crucial about this harmful occurrence, especially in Macedonian circumstances, is that the journalist-author of a certain text, article, story, photo, etc, is afraid to publish them, for fear of the consequences to his/her life, body, health, career, job, family, or his existence, i.e. financial stability. Whatever the manner and whichever the motives for it, self-censorship is only one of the many different, more or less subtle, possible means of censorship - which, on the other hand, is most strictly and expressly prohibited with our Constitution (Art. 16, p. 7 from CRM). In fact, the freedom of belief, consciousness, thought and public expression of thought are the "four holy rights" of our legal system which is under the authority of the Constitutional Court of RM which is entitled to act on citizens' appeals in concreto (Art. 110, p.1, indent 3 from the CRM) - yet, unfortunately, this has not occurred in the two decades of constitutional and legal history of independent Macedonia so far. The guidelines for overcoming this catastrophic situation should move towards an increase, as high as possible, in

LEGAL COMMENT

the self-organization and self-regulation of the guild of journalists; towards a rise in morals and courage of every single journalist to reject a certain "indecent proposal" in replacement for personal benefit, upholding primarily the principle of the social public interest; as well as with the improvement of the legal mechanisms for protection of this crucial right, which is the pillar of any democratic country upholding the rule of law. Considering the comparative-legal development directions, maybe we should seriously contemplate the introduction of the instrument of a constitutional lawsuit by which the journalists in question, those who are victims of censorship, would be able to more frequently demand protection of their rights, especially from the Constitutional Court, such as is the case with some countries in our near vicinity, for instance, Slovenia



In-between closing-down and censure

It takes about 50 minutes and two busses to reach Vesna's home in a Skopje suburban area. That's how much time she spends traveling every day to get to the Center of town, where the newsroom she works in is located. Her name is made-up, and Vesna is a pseudonym we used to name the journalist in our story who chose to speak anonymously. She works for an independent newsroom which is considered to be critical to the work of the government.

"I have never expressed my stances anonymously, but now I will make an exception" Vesna explains as we commute together to her home, to hear her story.

"I don't know how to tell you this, people are simply embarrassed of poverty", she tells us. Not 15 minutes have passed after this conversation that we had while we were standing in the crowded bus, when we realize what she had been talking about. Her home is in

fact not her own. Vesna comes from the interior of Macedonia and pays rent which she shares with her friend who has been her flatmate ever since they were students and lived in the rooms of the Skopje student dormitories. They rent a floor of a house. The furniture is so worn out that there is almost no cupboard or door with a lock or a handle left. They live in 45 square meters. One of them sleeps in the so-called bedroom, which is in fact a child's bed, a small wardrobe, a carpet with holes and a coffee table, while our colleague sleeps in the living room. Musty-smelling walls separate the two of them.

"I cannot afford anything more expensive than this. That is why

CRITICAL MEDIA
AND THE
JOURNALISTS
WORKING THERE
ARE SEEN AS
"ENEMIES OF
THE STATE"

I live in a suburban area. My family does not have any money to send me, and wouldn't want to ask them to, I am 28 and it would be a shame. The rent here is 70 EUR, while in Centar or Aerodrom we would have to pay at least 160 EUR for a similar place for the two of us. As it is, even these 35 Euros we pay are too much for me", says Vesna. Her salary is 12,000 MKD. She has been working as a journalist in a print media for nearly 5 years.

"Since I started work, until last month, I was a freelancer. My copyrighted work contract was extended every month. You never know what's in for you, you don't know whether they will extend your contract next month or not", tell us the young journalist and adds that what is typical for her case is that she even has understanding for the situation she works in.

"In the previous newsroom that I worked in, I was left at the mercy of my employer, while in this newsroom we, together with the employer are left alone at the mercy of circumstances. There is no money in critical media. There are no adds, only certain minor donations with which we barely make a living. I do not have anyone to blame for my situation, except maybe the Government for reducing the profession to a desperate level", she tells us as she prepares coffee on a gas hot plate.

"We must save. It's winter. I must have every single day planned with my income. We only warm up the apartment when we come back from work, we do not warm it up at night, which adds up to a few hours a day before we go to sleep.

Vesna says that at the start of her career she did not mind being a freelancer at all. She was satisfied enough to only work as a journalist, something that she had desired ever since she was a high-school student - to affect society, bring about change, inform the public, do research. Hence, whether she would be registered for benefits or not, was not a decisive factor at all.

"When I started working, they gave us a condition - this is the amount of the budget for salaries. Do you want to be registered employees or freelancers and get only 10 percent of personal tax deducted from your salary, - that's how they asked us. I am aware that my newsroom had no other money, so I said, all right, a freelancer, every penny is important to me", said Vesna.

However, later on, when she got a serious disease, she realized what it meant to be a registered employee with paid benefits for health and pension insurance. In the course of several months, a third of her salary was spent on the tests necessary to discover what it was that was triggering her everyday problems. It became unbearable and she asked her bosses to find a way to register her as an employee.

"My salary is slightly lower now, but I do not feel it because I get

to keep the money I previously spent on medications. In spite of it, I cannot and do not want to accuse the newsroom I work for. I have understanding for all of my colleagues working as freelancers in media which are generally supported by modest donations and have accepted the status of freelancers in order to get a slightly higher salary, and when I say slightly I mean ten, 12, 14 or 18 thousand MKD at the most in some of the media. The options in all, meaning even the pro-government media are those - being registered as an employee is simply a huge privilege”, Vesna tells us.

Vesna says that at the moment her biggest fear is not the disease, nor the fact that during the last days of the month, before she gets her salary, sometimes she goes hungry or has a single meal a day. Her fear is that even what she has now as a journalist, may be gone as early as next month.

THEIR SALARIES,
IF THEY GET
ANY, ARE
TERRIBLY LOW.
THEY HAVE NO
INCOME AND THE
FEAR OF COURT
PROCEDURES
IS GREAT

“Media houses are constantly closing down. Here, in our office, every day is uncertain, we do not know how long we will have the funds to operate and whether the donor will approve some more funds or will not have any money for it. And those projects do not cost a lot, about 20 or 30 thousand EUR a year. Just try to run a newsroom with that money and support yourself in the course of 12 months”, says Vesna.

She says that she dislikes considering herself poor, although according to all the parameter she belongs in this category of citizens.

“I have seen troubles greater than mine, and injustice worse than this. That’s it. The life of many of my colleagues is that of misery, trust me. And we seem to have come to terms with that. It’s either that, or a job in a government media, under control. But even there the reporters do not have a very nice living, at least not the “mere mortals” who are not editors”, Vesna says.

And it is truly so, Vesna’s destiny is not singular. It is shared by many of her colleagues, and everything, at least according to the impression shared by many, is getting worse and worse.

Critics treated as enemies of the state

Many journalists would say that 2011 was one of the bleakest years for the media in Macedonia - the year when a total of five media closed down. In July 2011 the first independent television station in the country, and most probably the most influential newsroom -

A1- closed down, followed by the newspapers Vreme, Shpic, and Koha e Re. They were all owned by Velija Ramkovski, who is now in prison, and they were all critical of the Government's policies. Ramkovski was convicted of financial crime and tax evasion, but the report of the European Commission expressed concern over the selective approach in the procedure. About 500 journalists and media workers from these media only, were left jobless afterwards.

The number of unemployed journalists has grown since. The weekly magazines Forum, Globus and Gragjanski closed down as well as the daily newspaper Den, the AB television station, A2 television; TV projects got terminated. With the changes in the editorial policies to the benefit of the government's policy, journalists bearing the trait of "critical" were additionally laid off, even in media such as Utrinski vesnik, Alfa Television, etc...

The international organizations dealing with the issues of freedom of speech, informed that more than 800 journalists and media workers have lost their jobs since 2011 onwards in Macedonia.

Those who were deemed undesirable were the critical journalists or those journalists who refused to carry out party assignments. Those of them who still had a job, were trying to withstand the pressures in the media in which they were already working, and which changed their editorial policy overnight, while others made attempts to group around the only remaining free space - the Internet. Some of them, under their own name and surname, while some others anonymously shared their experiences in running and working in such media. And many of them and their employees share Vesna's financial destiny.

Predrag Petrovic started working as a journalist in the public service of MRTV in 1997. He started off as a reporter, and then went on to become both editor and host in this television station. In 2002 he moved to the independent television A1, where he remained until it was closed in 2011. That same year he started working in the new daily Fokus, and eventually he decided to establish the informative portal A1on.

"Many of us, especially those coming from former A1, could not find a place anywhere. It was not important whether you had the skills, experience and knowledge, it was not important whether you were good or not, simply, the journalists from A1 were like a plague that everyone was running away from, we bore the label of "enemies of the state". We had to find our own place under the sun if we wanted to work independently and professionally and remain critical towards the work of the Government", says Petrovic.

He says that if it had not been for the donations, his newsroom would not have existed. However, even with them, they barely make

ends meet, since, as he says, the media market is lead by ideologies, and not a sense of business.

“We have almost no advertisements, the large and medium sized companies mainly boycott us, since, as they say, they are afraid of inspections if it is found out that they are supporting us with advertisements. It is not important whether your quality is good or whether you are widely read, it is important how you are esteemed by the government. The marketing agencies, on the other hand, openly tell us that they may not even think of sending advertisements to our office”, he says.

Semi Mehmeti, former editor in the daily newspaper Koha e Re also agrees with him. He now has the portal in Albanian - Almakos.

He says that if it hadn't been for the modest donations, he would not have had a newsroom at all.

“I say modest donations, since tell me whether you would be able to make a newsroom with a budget from a thousand to three thousand EUR a month, and even make it serious?! There are no advertisements. The companies that traditionally advertised in our media, are now avoiding us; trust me, we have a completely identical situation in the Albanian block as well. One big and rich company finally made its mind up to advertise on our portal, and imagine, they pay us as much as 150 EUR a month. And that same advertisement would cost at least 500 EUR a week in the pro-government portals. This is social

assistance, not advertising”, Mehmeti says.

Six journalists work in Almakos. Mehmeti is both a journalist, an editor and owner. His employees, he says, take a salary which is much lower than the state average.

“We're a far cry from the average salary, our salaries are way below it, they are miserable. For both me, and them. I would like them all to be decently paid, and not to live on the brink of poverty, but there is no choice. One either needs to be part of VMRO or DUI in order to keep the government's advertisements flowing, or fight for projects whose annual amounts are lower than the monthly revenues of some of the pro-government portals” says Mehmeti disappointedly.

Mehmeti says that his journalists, as well as himself, are aware of how things are going - you either opt for better conditions and

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DEALING WITH THE ISSUES OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH INFORMED THAT MORE THAN 800 JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS HAVE LOST THEIR JOBS SINCE 2011 ONWARDS IN MACEDONIA

control, or your work is free, but poorly paid, and you wait for better times to come for journalism.

Everyday life filled with fear and uncertainty

Xhelal Neziri, President of the Center of Investigative Journalism - SKUP Macedonia, says that the situation in the Albanian independent media may even be worse, since they do not only compete with the Macedonian portals, the content of which is also read by Albanians, but the media from Kosovo and Albania as well, which are present here too and are also their competitors.

“Predictably, all of this affects the social standing of journalists, who are increasingly trying to find a way out of this profession, by looking for a job in other areas. Journalists themselves are aware that the newsroom in which they work, or the owners themselves are unable to offer them better conditions, regardless of whether they are guaranteed by law or not”, Neziri says.

Biljana Petkovska from the Macedonian Media Institute says that they are monitoring these situations and their conclusions are that they have serious impact on the quality of work.

“Very often their income is under any professional dignity, and they cannot be compared to those from any of the countries in the region. The conditions they work in are alarming. The low salaries, uncertainty of the workplace, and the constant fear of losing one’s job have had their share in making journalism one of the least desired and respected professions in the country”, Petkovska says.

A journalist in one of the independent portals who wanted to stay anonymous, says that almost all the people in his office are freelancers, and the salaries are between eight and 15 thousand MKD. He is aware that there is no big money in such a newsroom, but what bothers him the most is that the financial situation of those media seriously affects the work process.

“The office has no money to pay for my taxi fare, or for the petrol I use, so I have to walk to the interviews or press-conferences. We don’t even have money for a photographer, so we act as photo-journalists ourselves. Proofreaders are out of the question, so we often publish texts with errors. The computers at work were a donation, also the desks. We are crowded in terribly small offices, we don’t even have a fridge, we make our coffee on a gas hot place, we just recently got a printer, not to mention anything more”, he says.

Petrovic agrees that the Internet media barely satisfy any professional standards, while there can be no mention of something more serious than that, such as investigative journalism.

“There are days when I am unable to even pay the taxi for a

journalist to go out on field. The office is no place for investigative journalism. And it can barely be the place for informative journalism. My journalists do everything, follow everything, we cannot afford the luxury of having specialized journalists, have a business section, then a politics or foreign affairs one. We are just a bunch of people trying our best in order to be able to do what we want honestly and get some money for it”, Petrovic says.

Self-censorship: When fear is the best guard

Meri Jordanovska is a journalist in the Fokus weekly, whose owner Nikola Mladenov was killed last spring in a car accident under suspicious circumstances. After his death the daily newspaper Fokus was extinguished, and the Fokus weekly magazine was also temporary suspended. Jordanovska and her colleagues lived in uncertainty up until a few months ago, since it was not clear whether the magazine, which even before Mladenov’s death was facing financial difficulties, would continue to be published or not. In August last year Fokus was finally republished, but they share the destiny of their other colleagues from independent critical media - few advertisements and modest donations. All of this, Jordanovska says, prevents them from creating high-quality work.

THE SITUATION IN THE ALBANIAN INDEPENDENT MEDIA MAY EVEN BE WORSE, SINCE THEY COMPETE WITH THE MACEDONIAN PORTALS, AS WELL AS THE MEDIA FROM KOSOVO AND ALBANIA

Since it is very few of us now, we are financed with donations and everything is transparent, I can see very well why we save on heating, why when we go on a trip we make sure we exhaust all possible stories about that town so that we would not spend money on petrol twice... simply, there’s no money. And how can you prepare serious stories if you don’t have the money for documents, trips, if you don’t have time, which the office cannot provide you with, since people, like the money, are scarce and can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Simply, it’s all improvisation”, she tell us.

However, what is even harder to take, is self-censorship. Usually censorship is connected to pro-government media, but lack of money leads to strings of problems among critical media too, starting from fear, and ending with self-censorship. When you are constantly against the wall, the fear of lawsuits grows, something that journalist Emil Zafirovski, who started his career in Dnevnik,

and then worked in the dailies Vreme and Nova Makedonija, while he now works in the informative portal mkd. mk, has felt on his own skin.

“I have been dragging around in courts for ten years. I was tried in absence, and then I found out about the sentences from the bailiff agents, after they blocked my account because the verdicts had entered force, and I had not been informed about being sentenced at all. For years back journalism is one of the most degrading and stressful professions in the country, and at the moment also one of the worst-paid. A large number of journalists are not registered as employees, their salaries are not regular, but in turn they are regularly exposed to lawsuits by public office holders, and they have no legal protection”, says Zafirovski.

The Fokus weekly is facing a similar situation at the moment. As things are, in the court process started against the weekly by the Head of the Administration for Security and Counter Intelligence - Sasho Mijalkov, the editor of Fokus, Jadranska Kostova was sentenced to pay five thousand EUR, while journalist Vlado Apostolov a thousand EUR; together with the court expenses, they need to pay a total of nine thousand EUR - an amount that average Macedonian workers are unable to afford under any circumstances. Whether to publish anything about Mijalkov is a dilemma in any newsroom, regardless of how independent, objective and professional media house it is. The existence of the newsroom would nevertheless be brought into question. At least that's what the experience of a journalist from a Macedonian editorial office, who spoke to us about his fears anonymously, tells us.

I had a good story on the Head of Administration for Security and Counter Intelligence, Sasho Mijalkov. My director, who is also a journalist, told me he could not run it, because he was afraid of lawsuits; he kept telling me: see how Jadranka and Vlado ended up. Write what you will, but not about this! The same thing has happened with other stories, he simply tells me: “If he presses charges we will lose even if we are right, it wouldn't even take a fine 27,000 EUR, 5,000 EUR would be enough to close us down immediately. Therefore, criticize, but with a good measure”, tell us a journalist from a web-portal.

She says that she has also caught herself in the traps of self-censorship, without being told anything by anyone.

“I would find a story about some of the highest-level officials and I would say to myself, let it go, they may not even let you cover it at work, and even if they do, who would drag around in courts. We no longer assess the weaknesses of our stories, we do not say, all right, I have the evidence for this one and I can publish it, while this other one is not supported with evidence, so I won't run it. We have a

single parameter - the controlled judiciary. If the story is about the corruption of an official of the third rank, it may run, if it is about someone from the first or second rank, then we do not try at all” says a journalists and adds that the lawsuits against Fokus, as well as the other cases in which journalists were sentenced, acted as a good “preventative measure” for everyone.

Semi Mehmeti from Almakos, says that they are not afraid of publishing scandals, but he does confirm that if a lawsuit is lodged, he would have no means to protect the journalists, himself or the newsroom.

“Who’ll guarantee court justice for me?! We can all see what is happening, we are no fools. There is no money to pay fines, no money for a lawyer”, Mehmeti says.

At the moment, the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Professionals provides legal aid to sued journalists, as well as ZNM, and at times some of the lawyers offer their assistance pro bono, being aware of the bad state of the critical media.

After the decriminalization of libel came into force, the new law has envisaged fines for the newsroom of 15,000 EUR, 10,000 EUR for the editor and 2,000 EUR for the journalist.

“This situation has created a culture of censorship and self-censorship in the offices and among the journalists themselves, lack of work ethics and no interest in investigative research on topics which critically perceive the situations in society. Thus we strategically stigmatize and demission the role and social purpose of journalism and the profession and its relevance as a corrector to the processes”, says Biljana Petkovska from MMI.

Vesna, the journalist from our story, tells us that prior to 2010, when journalism was, more or less “normal”, her dream was to sign collective agreements in her profession and create an efficient trade union.

“The dream of a trade union has come true, although it is impossible unless we are united. But I have forgotten about the dream of a collective agreement. We have to take even shorter annual holidays, since there are simply too few people to work, imagine giving even more responsibility to this kind of media. Great irony. There is simply no way out”, Vesna says.

Hope won't let us bend our backs

However, there is hope. That’s at least what Ida Protuger, a journalist unemployed at present, says, who claims that despite all the pressures and restraints, she will not bend down and fall.

“If you have decided to make journalism your profession, you must know beforehand that it is a stressful profession, there is this

competitive battle to be fought, you need check every piece of information, you have responsibility in front of the viewers and readers. But that is the good part of the work. What is really frustrating is what is really hard to accept to any journalist who has entered the profession with honest intentions to stick to their identity, are the pressures within the working environment, starting from “friendly” advice, to censorship. I have faced uncertainty and fear that I may lose my job several times, and it impossible to forget those stressful periods”, Protuger says.

However, a recent event restored her faith that there may be some hope to get over this difficult transition in the area of media communications, if journalists themselves make efforts to save their integrity.

“Am I happier like this? Yes I am, although I have to find a way to provide some income, and that might not be possible in journalism. Or it will be, in case there are more people with integrity who will oppose the harmful processes. I recently heard that a colleague of mine, a single mother, rejected a higher salary in one of the “pro-government” portals in order to work for a smaller amount in independent media. This gives me hope”, Protuger says.

The fact that we have started to talk about problems clearly and loudly, which can be illustrated with this text, also gives me hope, since many of the journalists, although they were given such an option, refused to speak anonymously and insisted to be signed with their name and surname. Only that way will the seventh force become strong and overcome the problems and in the end conclude that it was a worthwhile battle.

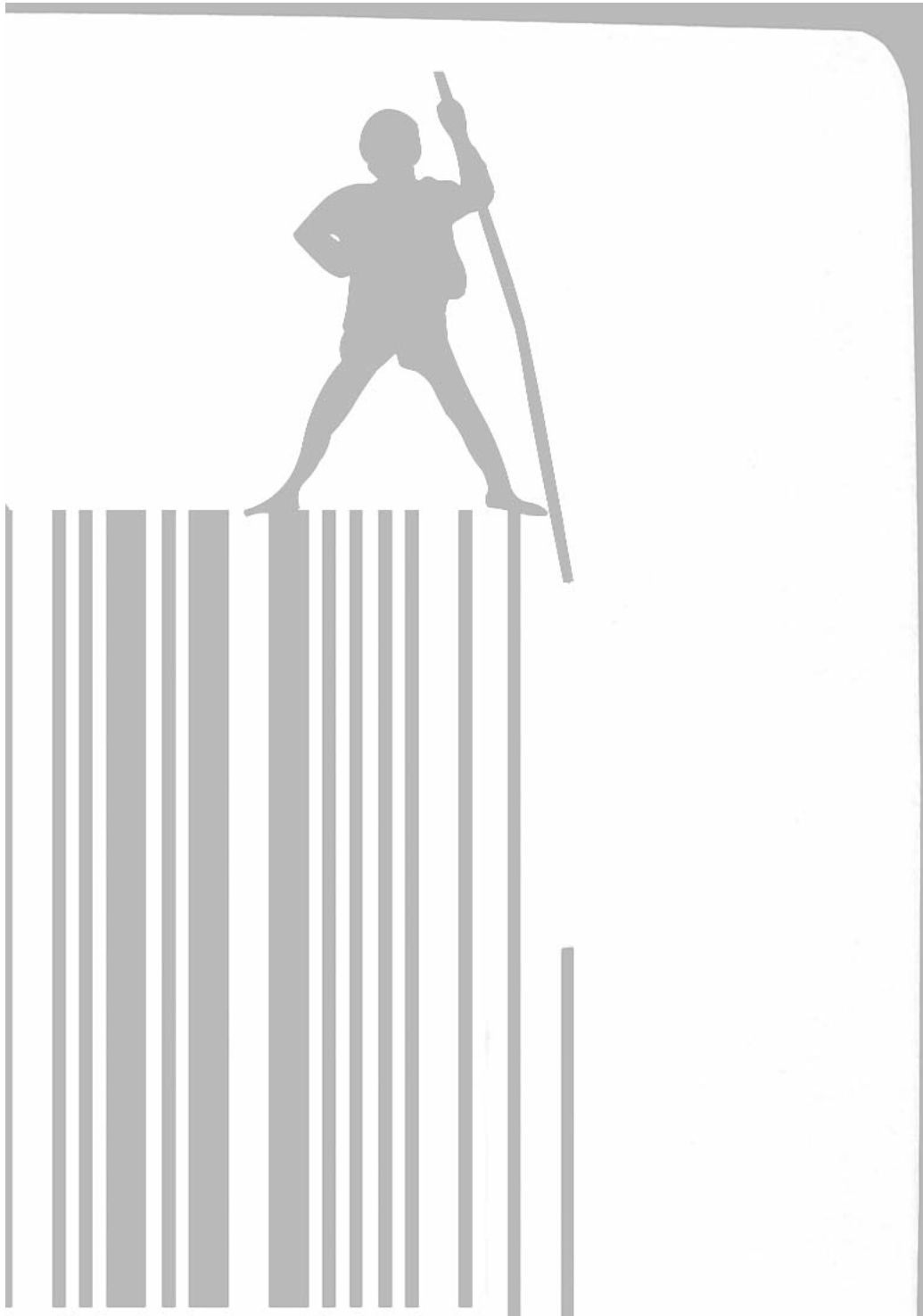
Sashka Cvetkovska

Although this piece of journalist writing raises a lot of serious issues which realistically depict the very complicated existential situation in which most of the Macedonian low-paid journalists are - whose average salary, by the way, moves from one hundred to three hundred EUR, - here, we would still like to tackle one of the bitterest problems of Macedonian journalism which we would qualify as government extortion. Namely, this term would cover the following situations: (a) malicious filing of lawsuits in order to intimidate certain, mainly investigative journalists - by holders of powerful public offices, who, to make the irony worse, are untouchable for the court authorities when they are in the position of the sued party. These proven mechanisms of pressure are unacceptable in a democratic society! They fully meet the criteria for qualifying in the notorious group of so-called SLAPP appeals - Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. Namely, according to the internationally accepted definition of these appeals, it is "a lawsuit which aims to [self]censor, intimidate, and silence journalists/activists by burdening them with court taxes and costs - until they withdraw their criticisms"; setting one's "eye" on certain critical media and their malicious punishment by the repressive state bodies (by means of various inspections, the Broadcasting Council as a regulatory body, then through its Public Revenues Office etc.), and all of this in order to apply pressure so that they would change their editorial policy. In extreme cases, if these methods have not born any fruit, they may choose to fully disable i.e. forcibly close the newsroom; and (c) giving privilege to certain,

LEGAL COMMENT

national or local, media which are close to the government and their favoring by paying compensation for all-too-frequent government campaign advertisements. To make the irony worse, the employment status of those journalists working in these so-called pro-government [rich/profitable] media is just as bad, maybe even worse than that of those working in the so-called critical media!?

In order to avoid this reel of mutually connected problems, it might be good to think things over and, apart from getting organized in trade unions and civil associations, journalist to focus their efforts towards creating their own journalist cooperatives or "free collectives" and, by using the advantages offered in the Law on Cooperatives (2002) to try and promote a completely new model of anti-corporate journalism, which would be much more difficult to control and manipulate, since in that way there would create a network of several independent investigative-journalist "nests" or cells who would deal with the real problems in society and the protection of public interest, without any possibility of pressures and self-censorship.



The low levels of Macedonian journalism

Censorship, mobbing, insecure jobs, layoffs, low economic and social status - this is the every-day situation faced by media employees, proves the research conducted by the M-Prospect Agency from Skopje, commissioned by the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers which covered a representative sample of 300 respondents, the multitude of which (98%) were journalists.

RESEARCH BY THE
INDEPENDENT
UNION OF
JOURNALISTS AND
MEDIA WORKERS
AND THE
M-PROSPECT
AGENCY ON THE
WORKERS' AND
PROFESSIONAL
RIGHTS OF
JOURNALISTS
IN MACEDONIA

The results of the survey show, for instance, that as many as 65 percent of the journalists have been subjected to censorship themselves, while 53 percent practice self-censorship.

Censorship and self-censorship are highly dependent on various means of pressure applied to the media and journalists. Therefore the respondents were asked to rank the means of pressure most frequently applied to them. Virtually half of them (49%) emphasized the economic and social status (threats with dismissals, fines...) as the highest-ranking means of pressure. One quarter of the respondents (24%) found this to be direct censorship, while part of them see mobbing as the main means of pressure (16%). Eight percent of them see pressure by means of

corruption (free telephones, per-diems and other benefits).

The survey also investigated the presence of mobbing in editorial boards. According to the results, more than half of respondents (60%) have experienced mobbing either as victims, or as witnesses.

The results regarding journalists' freedom and integrity are also

alarming. More than a third of the respondents (36 percent) have either been victims or have witnessed a situation in which a journalist had to sign someone else's text.

The respondents were also given the task to assess the role of the editor in the media with scores from 1 to 5 (1=does not defend them at all; 5=defends them completely). The role of the editor when it comes to defending their employees was assessed with an average score of 3. The request for assessment of the editor's defense of the profession in its entirety yielded a similar result, with an average score of 3.1. The average score (3.4) given when assessing whether the editor defends the interests of certain centers of power was somewhat higher; however as much as 50 percent of the respondents believe that the editor fully defends the interests of the management, assessing this with an average score of 4.1.

The research has shown that more than one quarter (27%) of the professional journalists practically have no engagement or make a living "by freelancing". Those who have signed temporary service contracts are in no better position, since the duration of the contract varies in terms of time, and the average duration of this type of contracts proves to be less than seven months according to the survey. However, the majority of the interviewees (59%) are employed under permanent employment contracts.

The payment of most of the journalists with permanent employment contracts is registered at the total amount of salary they receive (87 percent); the payment of eight percent of them is registered as lower, and they are paid the rest "in cash", while one respondent claimed to have been registered as being paid a certain amount, yet is bound to return part of the payment to the media owner.

As many as 90 percent of the respondents are dissatisfied with the amount of salary they get for their work (44 percent are not satisfied at all, 46 percent are "only" dissatisfied), while ten percent believe that they are adequately paid for their work.

Then it comes to job security, it can be best illustrated with the data that as many as 27 percent of respondents have been laid off, i.e. have lost their job, at least once. Five percent of them state that the reason for the layoff was their disobedience, fourteen percent claim that they quit their job because they were unable to endure the pressure applied to them, 11 percent described the reasons for their dismissal as unjustified, while the same percentage (11%) believe them to be justified.

The position of journalists in media can also be illustrated by the fact that they are almost completely excluded from the decision-making process when it comes to decisions directly affecting their status i.e. their social and economic as well as professional position. As many as 96 percent of the employees are left out of the decision-

making process when it comes to decisions of life importance (fines, redeployment, change of ownership, layoffs, etc). Two thirds (67 percent) are not included at all, and are only informed after the decision is made; 29 percent are not included, but are duly informed, leaving only four percent of journalists involved in the decision-making process when it comes to decisions affecting them.

Hence, we are not surprised that when asked: "How satisfied are you with the present state of Macedonian journalism?" a large majority (87%) of the respondents answered that they are dissatisfied. Similar answers were obtained regarding the economic situation of journalists. A large majority (79%) say that it is deteriorating, 17 percent believe that it remains the same, with only three percent of those who find it to be improving.

The results of the survey point to an exceptionally pessimistic perception among respondents regarding both the tendencies and developments in journalism. As many as 83 percent of them claim that the situation is deteriorating, 14 percent believe it remains the same, and only three percent of the respondents believe it is improving.

■ Survey on the workers' and professional rights in the media

In the period from 4 to 20 November 2013, the Research Agency M-Prospect from Skopje, in cooperation with the Union of Journalists, conducted research examining the attitudes of journalists and media professionals regarding their workers' and professional rights. The research was conducted by means of a telephone survey, i.e. computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), of a random representative sample of 300 respondents¹. For the purposes of the survey, the sample covered employees in a large number of media in the Republic of Macedonia, whereby not all of them were organized in Unions². According to the type of media that they are working in, the highest proportion was held by television journalists with 41 percent, print media with 29 percent, online media with 20 percent, radio - 6 percent, and journalists without any engagement at present - 3 percent. The average of the interviewed employees was 14.8% years of working experience. 52 percent of the employees in the survey were men, while 48 percent of them were women. The ethnical structure of the respondents was as follows: 87% Macedonians, 7% Albanians, 3% Serbians and 1% of Turkish and other ethnicities.

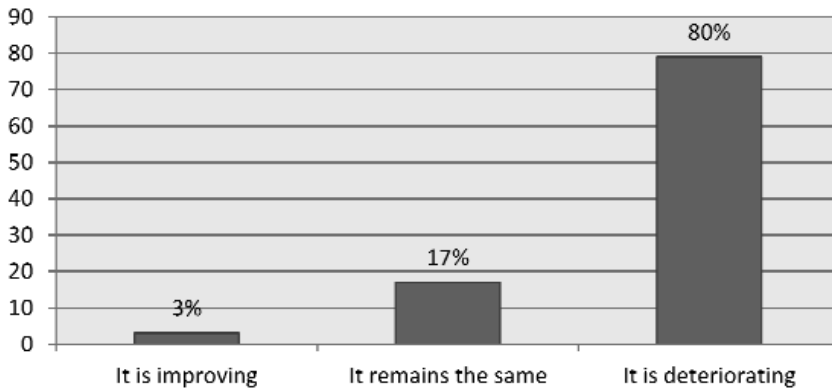
The results have a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$, at a confidence interval of 95 percent.

¹ The focus of this survey was on journalists. The proportional representation of other media professionals was minimal and falls under 2%.

² The database (telephone numbers) was provided by the Union and it was drafted from the membership forms of the members, the participants at the debates, conferences and seminars of SSNM.

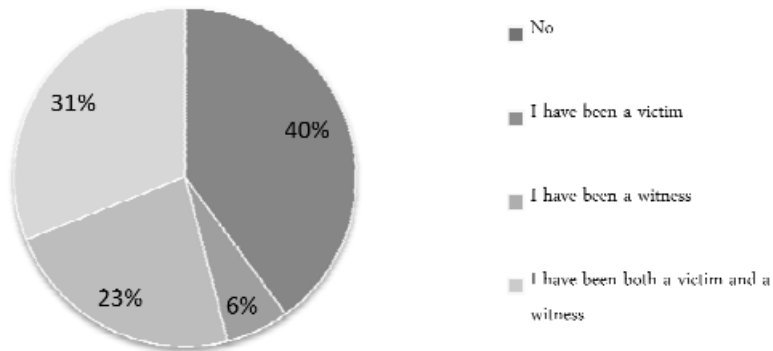
1. Questions related to the labour rights of journalists and media professionals

Question: How would you assess the economic and social position of journalists and media professionals?



A large majority of the respondents (80%) answered that the media situation in Macedonia was deteriorating from the aspect of their economic standing. 17 percent answered that the situation remained the same, while only 3% answered that it was improving.

Question: Have you ever been a witness or victim of mobbing?



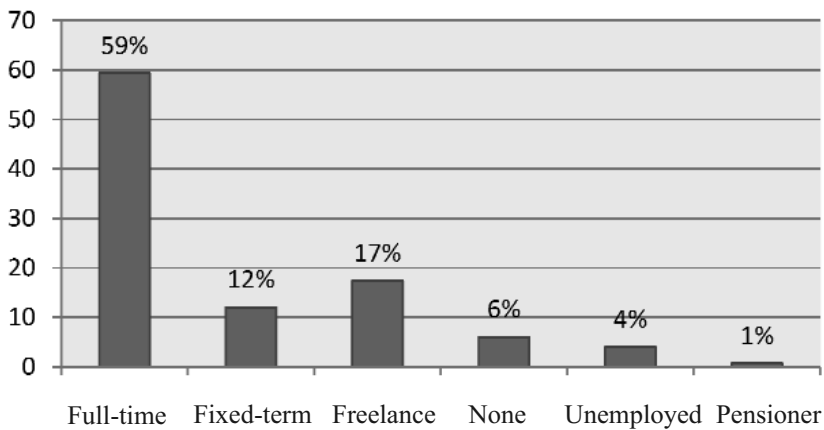
The majority of respondents have either been a victim or a witness of mobbing. Out of them, 6% have been victims of mobbing, 23% have been witnesses, while 31 percent of the respondents have been both victims and witnesses of mobbing. Less than a half, 40% of the respondents say that they have not been either victims or witnesses of mobbing.

Question: Do you consider yourself adequately paid for your engagement, education and experience?

| Do you consider yourself adequately paid for your engagement, education and experience? | Number | % |
|---|--------|-----|
| Yes | 32 | 11 |
| Partially | 137 | 46 |
| Not at all | 131 | 44 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

As many as 90 percent of the respondents were not satisfied with the amount of salary for their work (44 percent were not satisfied at all, and 46 percent were "merely" dissatisfied), while ten percent believed that they were properly rewarded for their efforts.

Question: What employment status do you have?



More than a quarter of the journalists and media professionals do not have a stable and secure job. 17 percent are freelancers under temporary service contracts, 12% have fixed-term contracts, while the remaining 11% work without having signed any kind of written contract, are unemployed or pensioners. The average duration of the fixed-term contract for journalists is 6.4 months. However, the survey shows that more than half of the respondents stated that they worked under a permanent employment contract (59%).

Question: If you are working under a contract, is it full-time or part-time?

| Is your contract full-time or part-time? | Number | % |
|---|--------|-----|
| Full-time | 207 | 69 |
| Part-time | 11 | 4 |
| Refuses to answer | 1 | 0 |
| Will not answer | 81 | 27 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

The majority of the respondents who have signed a contract answered that it was a full-time job contract, but there are also cases confirming the practice of registering media professionals as part-time workers; in fact 11 respondents, or 4% stated that they have were registered as half-time employees.

Question: If you are employed, how is your payment registered?

| How is your payment registered? | Number | % |
|--|--------|-----|
| Lower payment then what I receive is registered, I receive the rest in cash | 18 | 6 |
| I am registered as being paid a certain amount, yet I am bound to return part of the payment to the employer | 1 | 0 |
| I am registered at the total payment I receive | 202 | 67 |
| Other | 10 | 3 |
| Total | 231 | 77 |
| Refuses to answer | 69 | 23 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

The payment of most of the journalists with permanent employment contracts is registered at the total amount of salary they receive (67 percent); the payment of six percent of them is registered as lower, and they are paid the rest "in cash", while one respondent claimed to have been registered as being paid a certain amount, yet is bound to return part of the payment to the media owner.

Question: To what extent are journalists and media workers involved in the decisions affecting their economic and social as well as professional standing? (Change in ownership, outlining the editorial policy, systematization, promotions, salary cuts, new recruitments or layoffs, etc)

| To what extent are journalists and media workers involved in the decisions affecting their economic and social as well as professional standing? | Number | % |
|---|--------|-----|
| Yes, they are fully involved | 12 | 4 |
| They are not involved, but are duly informed | 87 | 29 |
| They are not involved and are only informed after the decisions are made | 200 | 67 |
| I do not know | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

The cumulative percentage of employees who are not included in the decision-making process is 96%. two thirds of the respondents answered that the employees are not involved at all in the decisions affecting their economic and social, as well as professional position, and are only informed after the decision is made. The percentage (29%) of those who are not involved at all, but are duly informed is twice lower.

Question: Does the management speak of overstaffing and for what reasons?

| Does the management in your media speak of overstaffing? | Number | % |
|---|--------|-----|
| Yes, in order to pressure the journalists | 101 | 34 |
| Yes, since we are truly overstaffed | 19 | 6 |
| No, they do not speak of overstaffing | 169 | 56 |
| Total | 289 | 96 |
| I do not know | 8 | 3 |
| Refuses to answer | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

The majority of respondents 56% said that the management does not speak of overstaffing, while 34% said this is being done in order to apply pressure on the employees. 19 employees, or 6% speak of a real situation of overstaffing, and 11 respondents, or 4% refused to answer.

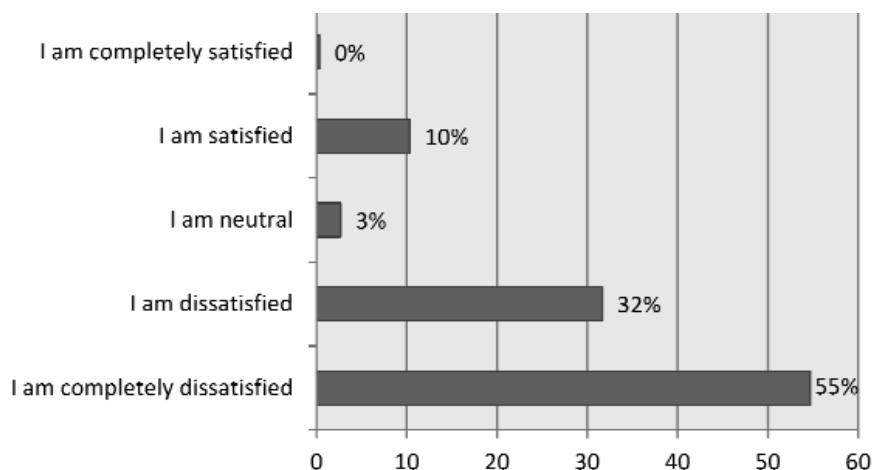
Question: *For what reasons have you changed jobs in your career?*

| Due to what reasons did you change your workplace? | Answers | |
|---|---------|------|
| | N | % |
| I have worked at the same workplace since the start of my career | 83 | 24% |
| For a better-paid position | 112 | 32% |
| I was laid-off for being disobedient (regardless of what formal reason was stated for this) | 16 | 5% |
| I was laid-off for justified reasons | 38 | 11% |
| I was laid-off for unjustified reasons | 39 | 11% |
| I quit the workplace because I was unable to endure the pressure | 47 | 14% |
| I do not know | 8 | 2% |
| Refuses to answer | 4 | 1% |
| Total answers | 347 | 100% |

The question referring to job security offered a possibility for several answers. The results have shown that as many as 27 percent of answers prove that the respondents have been dismissed at least once, meaning they lost their job. In 5% of the cases they stated that the reason for the layoff was their disobedience, 11 percent described the reasons for their dismissal as justified, and an equal percentage (11%) believe them to have been unjustified. It is interesting to note that as much as 47 percent of the answers, or 14% of the cases claim that there was a point in time in the journalists' career when they quit their job because they were unable to endure the pressure.

2. Results of the questions related to the professional rights of journalists

Question: How satisfied are you with the present situation of journalism in Macedonia?



The general dissatisfaction with the present situation of journalism in Macedonia expressed by the majority of respondents is evident, i.e. a total of 87%. 55% of them are completely dissatisfied, while 32 percent are dissatisfied. Only 10% of the respondents are satisfied with the situation.

Questions: Assess the media situation in Macedonia from the aspect of the professional position of journalists?

| What is the situation with the media in Macedonia from the aspect of the professional position of journalists like? | Number | % |
|--|--------|-----|
| It is improving | 9 | 3 |
| It remains the same | 43 | 14 |
| It is deteriorating | 248 | 83 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

A large majority of respondents (83%) believe that the media situation in Macedonia from the aspect of their professional position is deteriorating, while the remaining 14% believe that it remains the same.

Question: Rank the means of pressure according to their frequency

| Could you rank the means of pressure on media workers according to their frequency? | Number | % |
|--|---------------|----------|
| Impact on the economic and social status (dismissal, salary cuts) | 148 | 49 |
| Direct censorship | 72 | 24 |
| Mobbing | 49 | 16 |
| Corruption (paid telephones, trips, per-diems) | 23 | 8 |
| Refused | 8 | 3 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

Four offered answers were to be ranked in response to the question about the most frequently applied means of pressure on media workers. Half of the respondents (49%) chose the impact on their economic and social status as first-ranked. One quarter (24%) chose direct censorship as first-ranked, while 16% percent chose mobbing as first-ranked. The remaining 8% chose corruption. We can come to a conclusion that in most of the cases when the goal is to force journalists into something, they are threatened with consequences to their economic and social status (dismissal, salary cuts, etc).

Question: Have you experienced censorship in your career?

| Have you experienced censorship in your career? | Number | % |
|---|---------------|----------|
| I have never experienced censorship | 101 | 34 |
| I have experienced direct censorship (I was banned from working on.... by) | 196 | 65 |
| Refuses to answer | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

Nearly two thirds of the respondents - 65% have experienced direct censorship, while 3 respondents, or 1% refused to answer. The percentage of those (34%) who have never experienced censorship is twice lower.

Question: Do you practice self-censorship?

| Have you practiced self-censorship in your career? | Number | % |
|--|--------|-----|
| Yes, I have | 158 | 53 |
| No, I have not | 138 | 46 |
| Refuses to answer | 4 | 1 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

The majority of respondents 158 or 53% say that they do practice self-censorship, 4 respondents, or 1% refuse to answer, while 46 percent, i.e. 138 respondents say that they do not practice self-censorship.

The figure makes it clear that there is a huge overlap between those who practice self-censorship and those who have experienced censorship (78%). The numbers show that if we know that a certain journalist practices self-censorship, there is great probability in guessing that he/she has also been subjected to censorship

| Cross-results between the experience with censorship and practicing self-censorship | | Have you practiced self-censorship in your career | |
|---|---|---|-------------|
| | | Yes, I do | No, I don't |
| | | % | % |
| Have you experienced censorship in your career? | I have never experienced censorship | 22 | 48 |
| | I have experienced direct censorship (I was banned from working on.... by) | 78 | 52 |

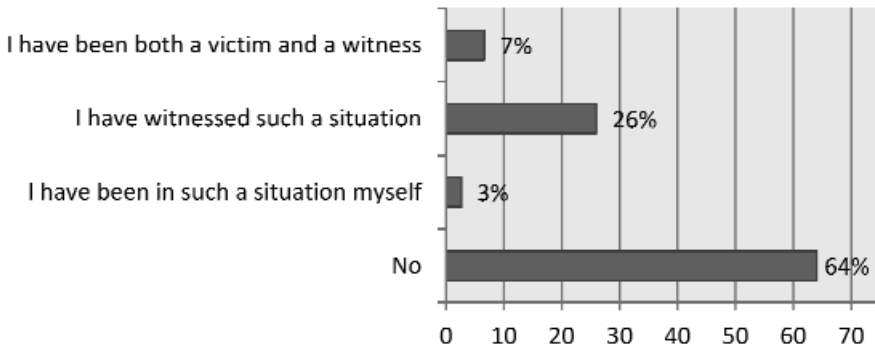
Question: Does the editorial board have the practice of rejecting a topic in case it is contrary to the ethical standards of journalism?

| Does the editorial board have the practice of rejecting a topic in case it is contrary to the ethical standard of journalism? | Number | % |
|---|--------|-----|
| Yes | 198 | 66 |
| No | 91 | 30 |
| Refuses to answer | 11 | 4 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

More than two thirds of the respondents (66%) have answered that their editorial board has the practice of rejecting a topic in case it is contrary to the ethical standard of journalism.

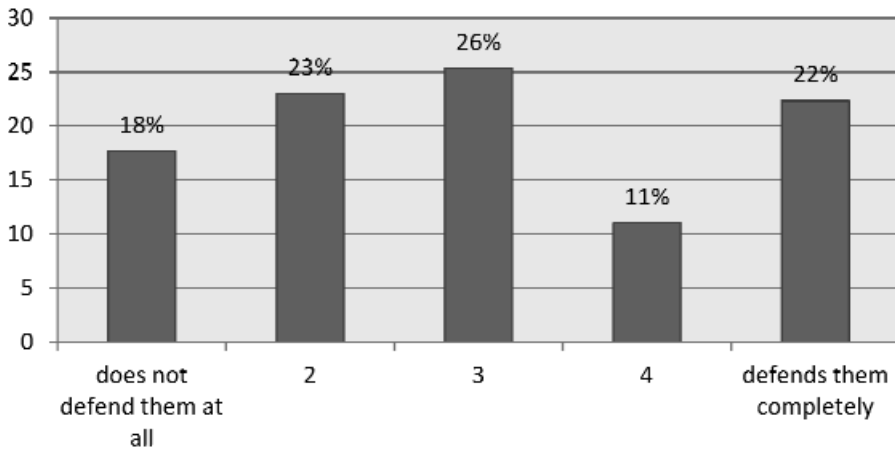
The remaining 30% percent stated the opposite, 4% refused to provide an answer.

Question: Have you ever been forced to sign a text that was not yours or have you witnessed such a situation?



One third of the respondents (36%) have been forced to sign a text that was not written by them, or have witnessed such a situation. Two thirds, or 64% say that they have neither been a victim, nor have witnessed such a practice in the editorial boards.

Attitude: The editor defends the interest of the employed media workers



When asked whether the editor defends the journalists' interest, on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1=does not defend them at all; 5=fully defends them), the opinions of the journalists are equally distributed throughout the scores. However, the highest percentage (26%) can be noticed in the score of 3 which denotes a neutral attitude. This is followed by 23% for the score of 2, and 22% for the score 5.

The average score is 3.

Attitude: The editor defends the interests of the profession

| The editor defends the interests of the profession entirely | Number | % |
|--|--------|-----|
| 1 does not defend them at all | 42 | 14 |
| 2 | 67 | 22 |
| 3 | 84 | 28 |
| 4 | 43 | 14 |
| 5 defends them completely | 62 | 21 |
| refuses to answer | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

When asked whether the editor defends the interests of the profession, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=does not defend them at all; 5=defends them completely, similarly to the previous question, the highest percentage of journalists (28%) gave the score 3. This is followed by 22% with the score of 2, and 21% with the score of 5. The average score is 3.1.

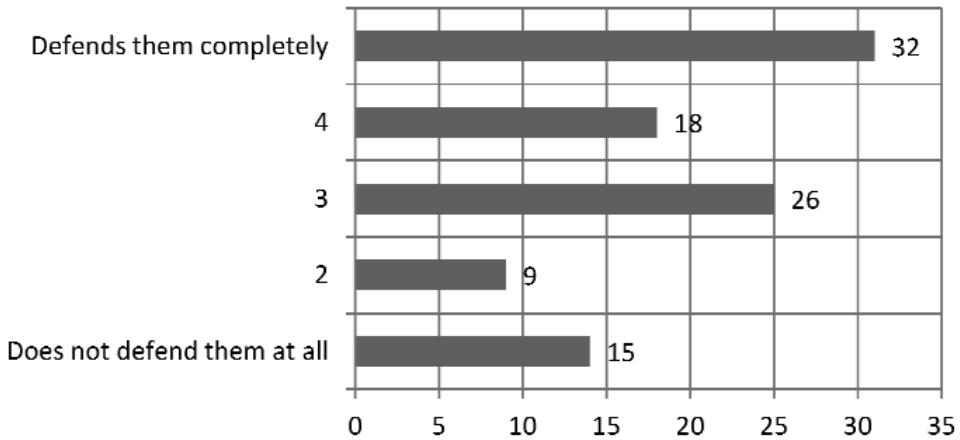
Attitude: The editor defends the interests of the management

| The editor defends the interests of the management of the media | Number | % |
|--|--------|-----|
| 1 does not defend them at all | 8 | 3 |
| 2 | 14 | 5 |
| 3 | 52 | 17 |
| 4 | 70 | 23 |
| 5 defends them completely | 150 | 50 |
| Refuses to answer | 6 | 2 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

When asked whether the editor defends the interests of the management of the media, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=does not defend them at all; 5=defends them entirely), unlike the case with the previous questions, one answer clearly stands out. Half of the respondents (50%) gave this the score of 5 i.e. they answered that the editor entirely defends the interests of the media management. 23% gave the score 4. The cumulative sum of agreement with the statement is 73% which indicates a large majority, opposed to a minority of 17% who have a neutral attitude and only 3% who believe that the editor does not defend/ completely does not defend the interests of the management.

The average score is 4.2, which at the same time also points to the highest level of agreement with the stance that the editor defends the interests of the management of the media, compared to defending the interests of the employees or the profession as a whole, or that of certain centers of power.

Attitude: The editor defends the interests of certain centers of power.



When asked whether the editor defends the interests of certain centers of power, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=does not defend them at all; 5=defends them completely), one third of the respondents believed that the editors fully represent the interests of certain centers of power, while 26% of them gave the score 3. The average score is 3.4.

Tests of correlation³

There is positive correlation between the satisfaction with the state of affairs in journalism and the perception of whether the editor protects the interests of the employees and the profession. Those who have expressed more satisfaction with the extent to which the editor defends the interests of the employed journalists, have also agreed with the statement that the editors defend the interests of the profession as a whole to a higher extent.

At the same time, there is negative correlation between the extent of agreement with the statement that the editor defends the interests of the journalists and/or the profession as opposed to the interests of the management and/or the centers of power. The respondents who agreed to the statement that the editor defends the interests of the management of the media to a higher extent, also agreed that the editor defends the interests of certain centers of power to a higher extent.

Between the perception that the editor defends the interests of the employees, i.e. the interests of the profession completely, and that the editor defends the interests of certain centers of power, there is a strong negative correlation. In other words, the journalists who have expressed higher agreement with the statement that the editor defends the interests of the employees or the profession completely, agree that the editor defends the interests of certain centers of power to a much lesser extent.

| Spearman's quotient | | How satisfied are you with the present situation of journalism in Macedonia? | The editor defends the interests of the employed media workers | The editor defends the interests of the profession in its entirety | The editor defends the interests of the media management |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| The editor defends the interests of the employed media workers | Quotient Sig. Number of respondents | .387** .000 297 | | | |
| The editor defends the interests of the profession in its entirety | Quotient Sig. Number of respondents | .430** .000 297 | .745** .000 298 | | |
| The editor defends the interests of the management of the media | Quotient Sig. Number of respondents | | -.343** .000 294 | -.293** .000 294 | |
| The editor defends the interests of certain centers of power | Quotient Sig. Number of respondents | -.283** .000 292 | -.584** .000 293 | -.612** .000 293 | .411** .000 291 |

³ The correlation is statistical analysis which indicates the extent to which the changes in one variable are followed by changes in the other. Depending on which direction the changes have taken, the correlation may be positive or negative. Positive correlation denotes the extent to which the variables simultaneously increase or decrease; negative correlation denotes the extent to which one variable increases while the other simultaneously decreases

■ Instead of a summary

The journalists drama is not abstract. It is palpable, living, essential drama of journalists and media employees.

It is the drama of single mothers who agree to give back half of their salary to the owner so that he/she can use it to pay the "freelancers"; it is the sad existential story of colleagues working for 40 years without having a single day of registered professional service because they have worked all their lives without being registered as employees; those are the facts that we ourselves are ashamed to say out loudly in public.

THE JOURNALISTS
DRAMA IS NOT
ABSTRACT.
IT IS PALPABLE,
LIVING,
ESSENTIAL DRAMA
OF JOURNALISTS
AND MEDIA
EMPLOYEES

The facts about the silence, about the lack of dignity, about the humiliation, the consent in the name of "subsistence", in the name of the ridiculous amount of money we bring home. Dismissals are handed out, workplaces are shut down, new media shoot up as project activities where people are treated as budget items - though unemployed, they are happy to have at least some kind of work to do. In

the eyes of the owners, and unfortunately, more and more often, in the eyes of the editors as well, the media workers are no longer professionals with knowledge and talent, but numbers which can be easily crossed over and replaced with new ones, while the principles of the profession are treated as fairytales for small children or beautiful stories for some "other times".

That is why many colleagues interpret talking about or calling on standards, on ethics, on professional integrity, as an offence. Because it reminds them of their own undignified everyday life.

Of the employment contracts, which, if they have them at all, expire every month and which can easily not be extended, the late salaries, the verbal employment arrangements which can be terminated unbelievably easily, with a single text message on a mobile phone, after ten years of service.

Some would say that such is the situation in all the sectors, that the journalists are nothing special and that they do not deserve to be singled out from the overall story, but it is not so. The effects of the destruction of the media industry, its reduction to colonial property in the hands of one or several crazy exploiters, the pauperization of the workforce, has directly affected the freedom of information and expression which are the foundations of all the other liberties, and the cornerstone of human dignity.

The insecure, poorly paid work turns journalists into people who are unable to stand up against pressure, against the authoritative impulses of corruption. Their role to act as counterbalance to the ambitions for abuse of power, regardless of which party they are manifested by, has been reduced to minimum.

A country without media who have independent editorial policy, regardless of their sources of finances, is a country in which journalism slowly dies and the price for it will be paid by entire society. Therefore, the issue of the situation in the media is an issue concerning all of us, and not only an issue of importance to journalists, their unions and associations.

Because when journalists are subject to manipulation, they become a source of sensationalism, hate speech, commissioned information instead of information serving the public interest.

Because the journalists who keep silent and who are afraid to ask, will not pose the key questions and will not put the moguls face to face with their responsibility and provide a critique to their work.

Because the low salaries, professional insecurity and the bad status repel and banish the talented and braves ones away from the profession, and make the professional solidarity impossible. Less and less professionals with integrity decide to defend the guild from the "newcomer" propagandists, who take cover behind the noble mission of journalism and contaminate the public space.

The propagandist media are dangerous because they do not pose questions, do not present investigative stories, do not tackle topics of public interest. They are also dangerous because they have demoralizing influence, they stifle the public which falls into a state of political superstition or resignation, it gets used to perceiving the unlawfulness as lawfulness, or at least as "normal".

Such media kill the spirit, the ability to react and to protest.

If the critical, free journalism is a pillar of democracy, promoter of debates, of exchange of ideas and constant critic of the abuses of the authorities, then the silence and disregard for the death of journalism, under the motto "it's none of our business" turns all participants in the public life, all professions and all addresses into allies in the murder of the profession indispensable for everyone. And the consequences will be felt by all. Without any exceptions.

Tamara Chausidis

