

MACEDONIA

INTRODUCTION

Macedonia's future, in almost every regard, was linked to the success or failure of the elections held on Sept. 15, 2002. Violence, accusations of fraud, widespread intimidation of the media, and political bias within the media marred the previous national elections in 1998. The current round of polling, the fourth since independence, was a critical measure of how the peace agreement brokered in 2001 would hold up. Indeed, the days preceding the 2002 elections were tense, with numerous instances of interethnic violence. However, election day passed without any major incidents.

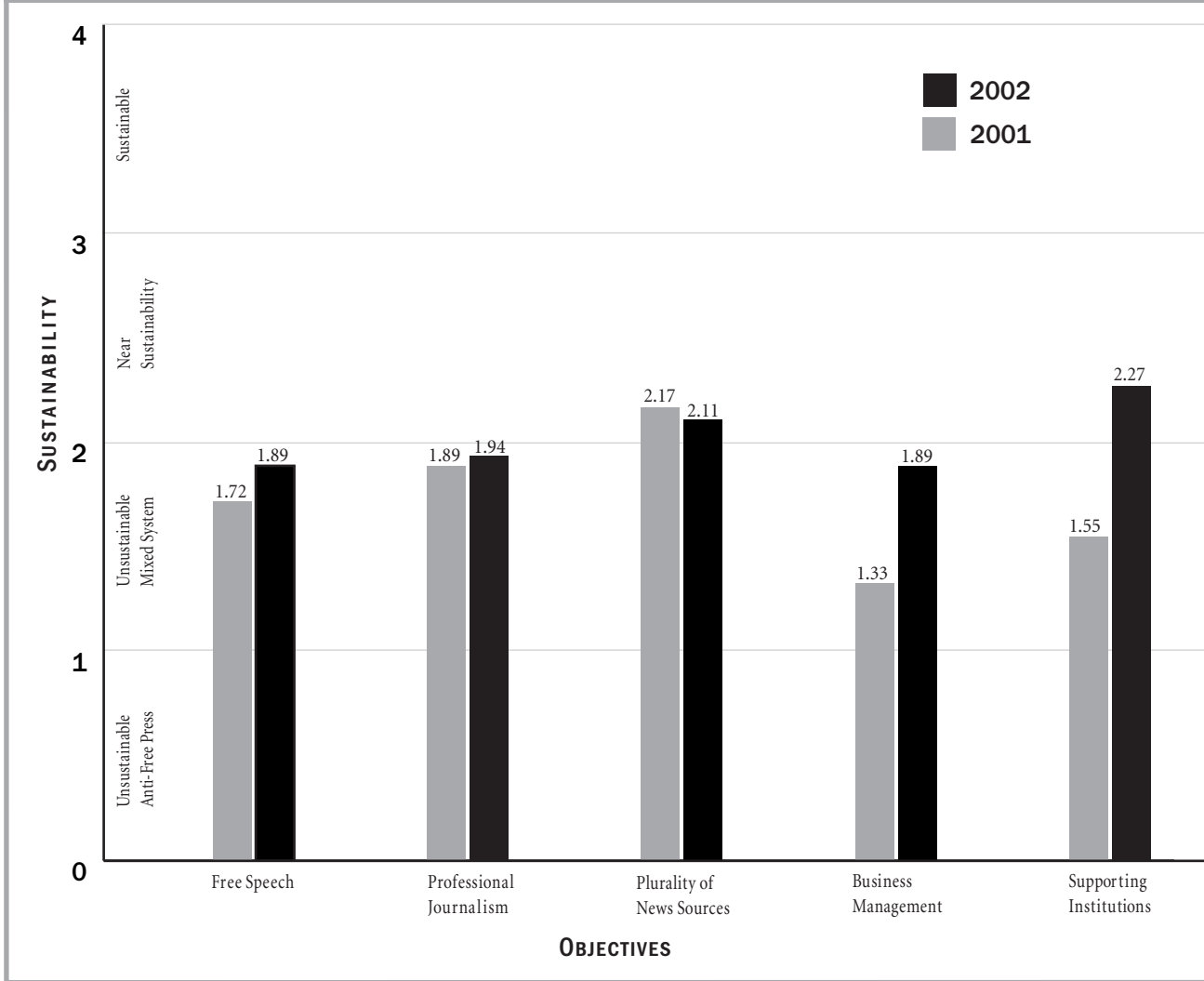
On September 16, the European Institute for the Media (EIM) released its comments on the media's election coverage. EIM stated that "the media in Macedonia demonstrated a certain level of professionalism, as both the electronic and print media have managed to provide balanced coverage of the election campaign run by political parties and candidates alike." However, EIM went on to say that the national public broadcaster, Macedonian Television (MRTV), the then state-owned *Vecer* daily, and the Albanian-language daily *Flaka* gave extensive coverage favoring the government.

Arguably, the most significant media development in Macedonia over the past year has been the strengthening of media associations and institutions. The Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) has grown particularly quickly. The Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel noted two significant protests organized by the AJM—the first after the accidental wounding of a journalist by the interior minister at a military display, and the second following the beating of a journalist in Kumanovo. Other institutional support in the media sector features the self-regulatory body (the Council of Honor), the excellent training and coordination work by the Macedonian Institute for the Media (MIM), general improvements in the Publishers' Association (APNAM), and the Media Development Center (MDC), which deals with legal reform. As a result, the panel indicated that supporting institutions showed a marked improvement from 2001 to 2002, moving from a score of 1.55 to 2.3.

Despite this improvement, the media environment remains very weak in Macedonia, as there are many fundamental structural prob-

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MACEDONIA—MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX



OBJECTIVE SCORING

The averages of all the indicators are averaged to obtain a single, overall score for each objective. Objective scores are averaged to provide an overall score for the country. IREX interprets the overall scores as follows:

3 and above: Sustainable and free independent media

2-3: Independent media approaching sustainability

1-2: Significant progress remains to be made; society or government is not fully supportive

0-1: Country meets few indicators; government and society actively oppose change

INDICATOR SCORING

Each indicator is scored using the following system:

0 = Country does not meet indicator; government or social forces may actively oppose its implementation

1 = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation, but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change

2 = Country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator, but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces

3 = Country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability

4 = Country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or changing social conventions

lems. Perhaps the most serious problem is the division of the media along ethnic lines. This was particularly evident during the 2002 election campaign. The Albanian-language media almost exclusively covered the Albanian parties, while the Macedonian media focused on the Macedonian parties.

However, freedom of speech does exist in Macedonia. There is a plurality of media outlets, particularly the Macedonian-language media. The Macedonian public is willing and able to pick from a variety of news sources. But the legal and regulatory framework of the media is cumbersome, the courts are ineffective, and corruption is rife. The level of professionalism among journalists is very low. The state-run media has a long-standing tradition of being the mouthpiece of the incumbent government. There is also a long-standing tradition of dividing the “spoils” of the state media between the governing coalition partners. According to this tradition, the governing Albanian party takes control of the Albanian-language media, and the dominant Macedonian party influences the Macedonian-language media.

In August 2002, the state publishing house *Nova Makedonia* was privatized, albeit in a very controversial manner. A Slovenian “front” company bought the publishing house shortly before the elections. Although no noticeable changes have taken place yet, speculation is rife that re-nationalization will take place or that the publishing house will be broken up and sold.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Macedonia Objective Score: 1.89/4.0—The Republic of Macedonia does not lack legal provisions regarding media. Article 16 of the Constitution and numerous laws and bylaws protect freedom of speech. It is fair to say that freedom of speech is exercised liberally in Macedonia. The Criminal Code of the Republic of Macedonia is rigorous, but the inefficiency of the legal system means those who violate the law fear no significant repercussions. While this gives journalists a great deal of freedom, it is a freedom that is regularly abused. Journalists act as if they are above the law, abusing their responsibility, objectivity, and professionalism in the media. The laws of libel and slander are routinely ignored, with the hopelessly backlogged and inefficient court system taking no significant action. In short, journalists often produce speculative work that lacks evidence and infringes on the rights of public figures.

Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.	
Free Speech Indicators	Legal/social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
	Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
	Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
	Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
	State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
	Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and the offended party must prove falsity and malice.
	Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
	Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
	Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

There are no clear guarantees regarding access to information. Journalists complain that they do not have access to government information. The panel blamed this lack of information-sharing on the former socialist tradition of keeping state information hidden for even the most mundane issues. Furthermore, the legal system is ineffective at wresting this information from the state. The irony of this situation is that the journalists are able to publish and broadcast unsubstantiated information without fear of legal consequence. One panelist asserted that “journalists do not fear libel, as there is no legal consequence in Macedonia. But there is a consequence. It is public mistrust. When real scandals appear in the press there is little public outrage, because there is little confidence in the truth of the story.”

There has been no change in the licensing of the broadcast media since the 2001 MSI. This process remains under the control of the Broadcast Council, which remains under the influence of the government. Although membership in the Council is structured to reduce government control, the Council can only recommend licenses before they are officially approved by the government. Therefore, most of the Council’s major decisions (regarding the issuance of licenses and the amount of revenue awarded to the private media in

return for public-service broadcasting) are far from the decisions of an independent body. It is worth noting, though, that in the lead-up to the national elections in September, the Council played a prominent and balanced role in reprimanding media that broke the election law and in calling for responsible behavior during the elections.

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The government continues to exert influence over the broadcast media by levying a broadcast fee that is paid by the Macedonian public as part of their electricity bill. Although the government gives this fee to the private broadcasters, it is hardly a transparent process. The Broadcast Council recommends funding for public-interest projects produced by the private media, and the government approves them. The end result is that the government may give large amounts of money to favored broadcasters. Meanwhile, the state-run media remain under the control of the government. Parliament directly appoints the general manager, who then strongly influences the appointment of the editors.

The media environment in Macedonia remains a bit of a paradox. The business environment is not slanted against the private media via unfair taxes. There are no significant restrictions on using international news sources or the Internet. The rebroadcast of foreign news programming is widespread. There are also no restrictions on entry into the field of journalism. There is no state registration of journalists, although the failed February 2001 draft law on public information contained draconian provisions for such restrictions. Opposition media outlets can and do put out information critical of the government. In the lead-up to the elections, A1 TV and many other outlets critical of the government received a number of aggressive visits by finance min-

istry officials. Despite this attempt to intimidate the broadcaster, business continued as usual.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Macedonia Objective Score: 1.94/4.0—A major weakness of the media in Macedonia is that reporting is rarely supported with evidence. One reason for this lack of fact-based support is the unwillingness of state institutions to divulge information, even though many ministries have spokespersons. Government ministries see the role of their spokespersons as a means to manipulate the media. The panel believed this is a main reason why journalists turn so frequently to speculation and unnamed government sources.

The panel asserted that state institutions provide information to journalists not necessarily to inform the public, but to fuel partisan political interests. Macedonia does not have an access-to-information law despite numerous initiatives for the development and adoption of such legislation. The panel agreed, however, that the absence of fact-based reporting is largely due to the editorial policy of the various media. Indeed, it is the editors themselves who are instruments of the political parties. The panel argued that Macedonia’s politically influenced businesses and elite groups control the bulk

Journalism meets professional standards of quality.	
Professional Journalism Indicators	Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
	Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
	Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
	Journalists cover key events and issues.
	Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
	Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
	Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
	Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

of the media. Journalists are not blameless. They rarely look for more than two sides to any story. A panelist suggested that “some 60 percent of what journalists write is subjective.”

There are positive developments, however. The AJM adopted a new Code of Ethics for journalists in fall 2001 in collaboration with MIM. The Code has been generally accepted by journalists and the media. In January 2001, AJM provoked a great deal of media coverage and debate within the media community by issuing a series of condemnations. One such condemnation was the pejorative portrayal of a female member of parliament from the Roma community.

Although the panel was very vocal on the subject of corruption among journalists, the participants agreed that there is no specific evidence of corruption. However, one panelist noted that “it is obvious that some journalists have crossed the ‘red line’ and made journalism a profitable business.” Another added that “a few years ago one could guarantee that no journalist in Macedonia made a fortune from his profession. Today that is no longer the case.” The panel agreed that corruption in the private media was the most problematic. Although the explosion in the growth of the private media since independence has created pluralism, the fledgling media are deeply corrupt. Even the state-owned media are not immune to corruption. Ten years after the establishment of a parliamentary democracy in Macedonia, the government still directly controls state media. As mentioned above, the August 2002 privatization of the state print media house, *Nova Makedonija*, was highly suspicious. The buyer, a Slovenian company, is widely held to be a front organization representing political-business interests in Macedonia. This ownership group has yet to show its hand. At the time of writing, there are also rumors that *Nova Makedonija* may be “re-nationalized.” It is too early to say how this privatization will affect the media environment.

The panel also agreed that corruption is widespread among journalists. In fact, large companies routinely threaten to withdraw advertising to prevent unfavorable news coverage. The panel also said that it was highly suspicious that some government ministries paid from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per month for media advertising. On a positive note, the panel agreed that the media generally cover all key events and topics. In addition, there is practically no misuse of power that is not reported. There have been numerous scandals in Macedonia that have been reported, and some have

even been documented reasonably well. Nevertheless, the reports fail to stir up public or legal reaction.

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An international panelist offered this criticism of the media environment: “Information provided by the government, by international organizations, and by virtually any other organization, is taken unquestioned.” There is a general sense of apathy and very little aggressive questioning at press conferences. Press releases are published and broadcast in their original versions. Such blind acceptance can be blamed on the high number of inexperienced journalists working in Macedonia and the lack of resources available to journalists. Also to blame for the low level of media professionalism are the financial constraints that limit the scope of private media, as well as undermine quality.

The panel argued that all newsrooms dream of having journalists who could cover one subject area and be able to verify all information and facts. However, all media outlets support small newsrooms and lack the personnel and equipment to maintain quality. Furthermore, Macedonia supports an entirely unsustainable number of private media outlets, even for a healthy market. Journalists, media owners, and managers harbor unrealistic expectations about their success. In short, the market cannot support the number of newsrooms and journalists that exist in the country.

The panel disagreed about journalists’ salaries. One panelist provoked quite an outburst by saying that journalists were well paid relative to the average level of pay in Macedonia. Others asserted that journalists’ salaries were catastrophic, especially in the state media. An average journalist’s salary at a state newspaper would be \$150 per month. At a private newspaper, the average is

\$300 per month. A local television station outside of Skopje would pay a reporter \$200 per month, while an editor would earn \$250 to \$300 per month. In Skopje, a reporter might earn \$300 per month, and an editor \$400. Some senior editors and reporters at large stations such as A1, Sitel, and Channel 5 might earn 20 to 40 percent more. The panelist who suggested journalists' salaries were relatively good also said that businesses buy advertising based on "wanting to buy editorial influence, or to buy into an existing editorial policy." While 15 to 20 companies advertise in *Kapital*, others refuse unless they can secure political influence.

Regarding self-censorship, the group agreed that it is most prevalent in the state media. Journalists fear losing their jobs if they offend a governing party or politician. Journalists consciously and unconsciously apply self-censorship to keep their jobs.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Macedonia Objective Score: 2.11/4.0—The number of media outlets in Macedonia changes frequently, but there are more than 120 private broadcasters, three national state television channels, 29 local state broadcasters, and nine daily national newspapers—although the privatization of *Nova Makedonija* is expected to bring changes. There are also approxi-

mately 60 magazines, of which 10 are serious weekly news periodicals and current-affairs magazines. Therefore, a plurality of outlets definitely exists. Almost all publications are available to citizens and offer a wide range of news and information. Critics argue that the Albanian-language media lack plurality, but some developments preceding the national elections proved

Overall, the public is aware of the ownership and bias of the media. However, the panel pointed out that the media are divided along ethnic lines with significant differences in reporting. Each ethnic group prefers to report on its own culture.

otherwise. For example, the government introduced the "3rd Channel of MRTV," a predominantly Albanian-language broadcaster. The channel also contains minority programming from ethnic Turkish, Roma, Serb, Vlach, and Bosnian groups of the former MRTV Channel 2. In August 2002, a private businessman introduced *Global*, a new daily newspaper that has two identical editions in Macedonian and Albanian. In addition, the Albanian weekly magazine *Lobi* published a daily special edition (funded by the international community) that focused on election coverage.

There are two news agencies in Macedonia. One is the state-owned MIA, and the other is privately run Makfax. There is general mistrust of MIA's information, since the agency is viewed as a mouthpiece for the incumbent government. Makfax is experiencing growing pains as it struggles to collect regular fees from media outlets.

Access to the media is generally restricted by economic restraints, even though the current cost of a paper is 10 MKD (about 13 US cents). This is a relatively cheap price even in Macedonia. The government does not restrict cable television, satellite, and Internet access. The only restriction is cost.

Media ownership is sufficiently diverse to provide a variety of sources and views. Although big business dominates media ownership in Macedonia, a broad-enough range of political affiliations are represented to provide significant diversity. Overall, the public is

Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.	
Plurality of News Sources Indicators	A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
	Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
	State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
	Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
	Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
	Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
	A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

aware of the ownership and bias of the media. However, the panel pointed out that the media are divided along ethnic lines with significant differences in reporting. Each ethnic group prefers to report on its own culture. The panel asserted that this is especially true of Albanian media. Macedonian-language media are more critical and more likely to cover social interests (though such coverage is rare and poorly done). In general, Albanian media are less likely to report on issues that could improve interethnic relations.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Macedonia Objective Score: 1.89/4.0—Distribution in Macedonia remains unreformed. There are three major distributors with overlapping services, and a handful of smaller local distributors. The high number of distributors increases costs unsustainably in such a small market. However, the privatization of *Nova Makedonija*, which includes the country's biggest distribution system, should cause dramatic changes in 2003. The publishers' association, APNAM, has attempted to set up a third-party distribution network to cut costs for its members. The network would also rationalize the industry before the privatization of *Nova Makedonija*.

The media market remains underdeveloped, but the media industry derives revenue from a variety of sources, including advertising fees, state funds, and

international donations. Private media still receive state funds. The broadcast media collect the 10 percent broadcast tax rebate allegedly for public-information programming. The print media gather a direct subsidy from the state budget. There is general consensus that these funds are used to influence editorial policy. In some cases, struggling media enterprises are propped up to support Macedonian big-business interests.

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The 20 advertising agencies in Macedonia cooperate well with the media. However, companies often place their advertisements according to the editorial policy they support. Advertising in the media would be greatly aided if the value-added tax paid by advertisers were reduced. This would not only reduce advertisers' expenses, but would also stimulate an increase in advertising. The publishers' association is launching a campaign for more favorable tax rates. In return for better tax rates, the association proposes cutting its state subsidies. If successful, this deal would dramatically reduce state influence over the independent press.

Market research has become more widespread in Macedonia. Brima/Gallup has carried out a series of major research projects for the print media and the broadcast industry. A number of publishers and broadcasters also conduct their own research, albeit on a smaller scale. Furthermore, circulation and ratings figures are increasingly reliable, and the overall quality of research is improving.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Macedonia Objective Score: 2.27/4.0—Perhaps the most significant improvements in the media sector are found in the affiliate organizations that support

Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.	
Business Management Indicators	Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
	Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
	Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
	Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
	Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
	Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
	Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.	
Supporting Institutions Indicators	Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
	Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
	NGOs support free speech and independent media.
	Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
	Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
	Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
	Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

independent media in Macedonia. There is a concerted effort in the media community to build a better media environment by coordinating associations and institutions, and by shaping a more professional standard of journalism in the country.

The trade associations are very active in Macedonia. The main broadcast association is the Association of Private Electronic Media in Macedonia (APEMM). Although the association has developed over a number of years, it still does not function well. The panel agreed that a conflict of interests exists within the association, as large television and radio stations tend to dominate the smaller stations. The association also struggles to represent its members consistently by not speaking with one voice. For example, when the association was lobbying the government to cut the concession fee, some members demanded a cut for radio stations, others demanded changes in the broadcasting law, and still others asked for a postponement of payments.

The Association of Print Media and News Agencies of Macedonia (APNAM) is the country's sole publishers' association. It has been working actively for two years. APNAM focuses its activities on several issues, including cutting the tax on advertising, establishing a fair pricing system for advertising, and rationalizing state subsidies to the media.

The AJM has been especially active in the past 12 months and has made a very real impact on the media scene. The association introduced a new code of ethics

in collaboration with the Macedonian Institute of the Media (MIM). AJM is making serious and transparent efforts to improve the quality of journalism. The panel agreed that AJM's Council of Honor, a self-regulatory body that oversees the Code of Ethics, is also an important step forward. So far the Council of Honor has publicly condemned several journalists who violated the ethics code. The Council has even assumed the role of a journalists' union; as such an organization does not yet exist. For example, a journalist in Veles was fired for no justifiable reason from a local public (state-run) broadcaster. With the Council's intervention, she was reinstated.

The nongovernmental organizations that work with the media in Macedonia are very aggressive. So far, many training sessions, seminars, and workshops have been organized to enhance the quality of journalism. The leading organization in this capacity is the MIM. MIM has conducted a large number of well-organized and well-coordinated trainings through its center in Skopje, including a competition for investigative journalism that has provoked considerable interest. The panel suggested that the need for more management training exists.

As mentioned above, the distribution system is costly and inefficient. The panel asserted that there is no professional distribution. Instead, there are "simply transportation companies which bring newspapers to kiosks using 10 to 15 vans." The formerly state-subsidized *Nova Makedonija* distribution system is the largest, with some 500-plus kiosks across the country. Following its privatization in August, its future is very unclear.

There are more than 450 printing houses in Macedonia, but only a handful are modern. There is no history of restrictions on access to printing or to newsprint. The distribution system, as described above, is inefficient and costly. In general, however, there is reasonably good access to print and broadcast media. It is important to note that transmitters were not targeted during the 2002 elections, as had happened in past elections. Internet access is not restricted but is hardly ubiquitous. The lack of Internet access is an economic, rather than political or legislative, issue. Many towns and all major cities have a number of reasonably affordable Internet cafés. Such cafés are increasingly popular, especially with Macedonian youth.

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