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MONTENEGRO

Politics—and the media—focused on EU and NATO accession over the past year. The EU integration process has made modest progress, and Montenegro is moderately prepared in terms of alignment with most of the chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, the body of EU law. However, it is clear that numerous issues remain, especially in the areas of rule of law, democracy, and the economy. The majority of citizens—70 percent—support EU integration.

In December 2015, Montenegro began the final stage of the NATO accession process, which should be complete in the next two years. However, NATO accession, unlike EU integration, has polarized Montenegrin society; currently, only a narrow majority supports it. NATO membership is opposed, in particular, by the political opposition, which 10 years ago opposed Montenegrin independence, and which is well known by its pro-Serbian and pro-Russian positions. The influential Serbian Orthodox Church also strongly opposes NATO membership.

During the last four months of the year, opposition party protests culminated in an open conflict between protesters and the police; more than 50 people, both citizens and police officers, were injured. These conflicts resulted in a parliamentary boycott by the parties that organized the protests. Despite the protests, the government still enjoys parliamentary support, and so far, there are no indications of a change in executive power. All signs indicate that current political turbulence and strong mistrust between the ruling parties and the opposition will be resolved in next year's planned parliamentary elections.

Despite a deep social crisis, in 2015 the Montenegrin economy made some progress. The GDP grew 3.5 percent, mostly thanks to foreign investment. While modest, this economic recovery is welcome after the recession of 2009-2012. However, Montenegro still has high public debt and a large budget deficit, and unemployment is still approximately 17 percent.

Negative trends in the media sector from previous years continued. The EU's annual *Progress Report* recognizes some progress in the area of freedom of expression. However, the EU called attention to resolving open cases of violence against journalists; ensuring the independence of the public broadcasting service; and developing guidelines for courts to align their rulings with those of the European Court for Human Rights in the area of freedom of expression.

The media scene is still a battlefield of political and journalistic interests, resulting in perennial divisions within the media community. Political and commercial motivations drive these internal divisions, and they become quite visible during elections and political confrontations. At these flashpoints, media display their biases openly, supporting either the government or the opposition. As in previous years, fierce trading of accusations and insults between opposing media is a regular feature, and the ruling party still holds undue influence on MRTV, the supposedly neutral public broadcasting service.

MONTENEGRO at a glance

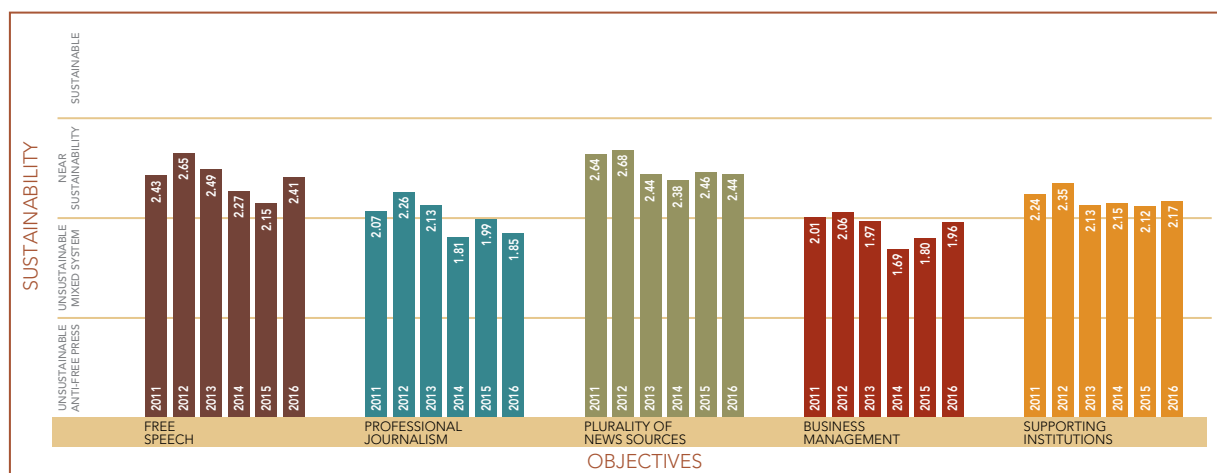
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 647,073 (July 2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Podgorica
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Montenegrin 45%, Serbian 28.7%, Bosniak 8.7%, Albanian 4.9%, Muslim 3.3%, Roma 1%, Croat 1%, other 2.6%, unspecified 4.9% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Orthodox 72.1%, Muslim 19.1%, Catholic 3.4%, atheist 1.2%, other 1.5%, unspecified 2.6% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Serbian 42.9%, Montenegrin 37%, Bosnian 5.3%, Albanian 5.3%, Serbo-Croat 2%, other 3.5%, unspecified 4% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2014-Atlas):** \$4.549 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- > **GNI per capita (2014-PPP):** \$14,530 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- > **Literacy rate:** 98.7%; Male 99.5%, Female 98% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Filip Vujanović (since April, 2013)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: 5 dailies, 3 weeklies, 30 monthlies; Radio Stations: 53; Television Stations: 19; Cable operators: 10 (2015, Agency for Electronic Media of Montenegro)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** *Vijesti* (circulation 3,500, private), *Dan*, (circulation 5,000, private), *Dnevne Novine* (circulation: 2,500, private), *Pobjeda*, (circulation 3,000, state-owned), *Informer* (circulation 2,000, private), (2015 est., Direct Media Ltd.)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Mina News Agency (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** €9 - €9.5 million (2015 est., Direct Media Ltd.)
- > **Internet usage:** 381,700 (58.7% of population) (2014 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MONTENEGRO



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2016: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2015

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

Scores for all years may be found online at http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Montenegro Objective Score: 2.41

The panelists agree that media legislation in Montenegro is well developed and that regulations adhere to international standards. Montenegrin legislation provides for and protects freedom of speech and offers a good legal framework for the development of the media sector. All of the key media laws (Media Law, Electronic Media Law, Digital Radio Diffusion Law, Law on Public Radio-Diffusion Services) are based on a normative framework, which incorporates tested international experiences and does not pose an obstacle for the establishment or operations of print and electronic media. The NGOs that monitor the activities of the media community, experts, and media analysts all agree that the legislative framework provides for freedom of speech and the development of professional and independent journalism.

Impediments to freedom of speech do not stem from legislative limitations, but rather from the overall political and social environment in Montenegro. Ranko Vujović, president of the Agency for Electronic Media, stated, "Montenegrin legislation is generally acceptable, and legal regulations do not pose obstacles for development of media freedoms." On the other hand, panelist Duško Vuković, an independent media analyst and researcher, pointed out,

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state of public media.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

"Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution and the laws governing the media sector, but Montenegrin society is captured by a participative and clientelistic system, which largely operates contrary to the standards set out by the constitution and the laws."

Regarding this position, Jadranka Rabrenović, a journalist for the daily *Pobjeda*, said, "The constitution guarantees free speech, and this is regulated by laws on electronic media and public service. The law does not allow for media to be shut down, and there have been no trials in which a reporter was asked to reveal sources of information." However, Sonja Drobac, the editor-in-chief of TV Prva, pointed to a legally controversial case: "This year, we witnessed the public prosecutor's office filing criminal charges against the editor-in-chief of TV Pink. The prosecution sought legal responsibility from the editor-in-chief for a criminal offense called 'false reporting'; this is an ongoing process and the first case of its kind in the region. I think this is simply intimidation of journalists, and this process definitely does not comply with media freedoms and the principles of a free press."

Overall, the panelists confirm that Montenegro has a solid legislative foundation, but they perceive a significant difference between the quality of the legislation and its practical implementation. In everyday media work, journalists and other media professionals see a significant problem of self-censorship in reaction to the overall political and economic environment. They also commonly witness cases of poor and incendiary reporting, which can undermine public faith in the concept of a free press. Certain topics, even when they are critical issues of public interest, are absent from the media, because journalists are under pressure from owners, unprofessional editorial policies, and external commercial and political interests.

As in previous years, the processes of licensing electronic media and statutory licensing operate without major problems. There are two national regulators (the Media Agency and the Agency for Electronic Communications), and the only major issues relate to the complex bureaucratic procedures and time needed to obtain appropriate licenses. In this regard, director of student radio KRŠ Đorđe Stojanović said, "From personal experience, I can say that the process of obtaining operating licenses for our radio worked without problems and in accordance with regulations." However, Vuković warned, "The recruitment of staff working with regulators is politicized, and decision-makers within regulatory bodies are not independent from the political will of the ruling power brokers."

Media business enjoys free entry into the market but is not favored in any way, compared with other types of businesses

According to Vuković, “Freedom of information is regulated by the law, but we see a lot of issues when authorities are trying to conceal compromising information. For example, the daily *Vijesti* has been trying for some time, unsuccessfully, to obtain information on illegal spending within the Ministry of Agriculture.”

in Montenegro. Business legislation in Montenegro treats all types of companies equally. Possible business or tax privileges do exist, but they do not directly relate to any specific type of business. However, print media (dailies and periodicals) pay a lower-than-normal VAT (value-added tax) rate of 7 percent. Drobac noted, “The authorities are quite flexible and lenient with the media when it comes to tax collection, but in practice there may be a selective approach to that issue, which favors certain media.” Rabrenović is on the same page: “There is no tax relief, but late payment of taxes by media is usually tolerated, particularly taxes on employees’ salaries.”

In 2013, the Montenegrin government formed an ad hoc committee to monitor all police and judicial investigations related to cases of violence against journalists. This committee consists of media representatives, NGOs, and national officials. While the committee still operates, its recommendations have had a limited effect. Other legal processes undercut journalists’ ability to do their job, including the case of the Special Prosecutor’s Office bringing criminal charges against the editor-in-chief of TV Pink, as mentioned above. Media professionals assess this case to be in conflict with media laws and the right to a free press.

Montenegrin journalists do not feel comfortable to investigate organized crime and high-level corruption. Furthermore, fear among journalists is even greater since many cases of violence against journalists in recent years have neither been resolved nor duly processed by courts. Montenegrin police and the judiciary are still not sufficiently effective and competent in dealing with cases of violence or threats against journalists. Experts consider it necessary to strengthen law enforcement bodies and good judicial

practice. Nonetheless, this year in Montenegro has seen no significant trend of serious physical attacks on journalists.

The public broadcaster MRTV is the subject of fierce debates between ruling and opposition politicians, with criticism also coming from civil society. For a decade, MRTV has had the status of public broadcasting service: it is officially independent, and special legislation declares it free from political interference. However, for years debate has been raging about the editorial independence of what was once the state broadcaster. Its operations are hindered by these political and broader social disagreements. Political parties and civil society often criticize the editorial policies of public media because they perceive the news and political programming to be neither in the public interest nor pluralistic.

Rabrenović pointed out, “Public media in Montenegro include the national public broadcaster and 14 local public media services, and it is quite obvious that politicians influence the appointment of the leaders of those media.” Public media, although legally designed to be media acting in the public interest, to a large extent are still dependent on the ruling parties, and any movement to establish editorial independence is making little progress.

Public media are supported by state and local budgets. They also have the right to sell commercial advertisements, putting them at an unfair competitive advantage over private commercial broadcasters. Government efforts to improve MRTV’s financial status are evident (with MRTV likely to receive 0.3 percent of the GDP, approximately €12 million annually). However, political and social disputes about the professionalism and independence of the public broadcasting service are still ongoing.

In 2012, libel was deemed a civil rather than a criminal offense in Montenegro. Just as in previous years, Montenegrin courts are treating defamation cases with leniency, which experts fear could open the door to increasing unethical journalism. Recently, an ongoing debate has ignited about reinstating defamation as a criminal offense; those in favor argue that terminating libel as a criminal offense was premature, a mistake on the part of the legislature.

As in previous years, the panelists noticed that the experience with the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act is uneven and selective, depending on

timing, political will, and institutional preparedness of national and local administrations. NGOs and journalists are highly critical of how the Freedom of Information Act is implemented. Journalist Milena Aprčević said, "Some government bodies remain hard to access, and on top of that, some government institutions provide information selectively to certain media." Drobac agreed, saying, "Often the level of cooperation of government institutions depends on the individual responsible for communicating with the media. Also, a great many institutions (with the exception of the ministries) do not publish information on their websites, even though it is their legal obligation to do so." According to Vuković, "Freedom of information is regulated by the law, but we see a lot of issues when authorities are trying to conceal compromising information. For example, the daily *Vijesti* has been trying for some time, unsuccessfully, to obtain information on illegal spending within the Ministry of Agriculture."

Montenegro has a quite liberal legislative framework in terms of the media's access to local and international news and information sources. The panelist Dragan Markešić, general manager of Direct Media, summarized the general opinion of the participants: "There are no limitations in accessing or using international news or information sources." At the same time, in recent years there has been a rise in copyright protection and protection of intellectual property.

Montenegrin journalists do not need licenses or special permits to practice; media companies determine individually the criteria for their journalists. The panel perceives that the absence of any journalistic licenses has resulted in a great loss of quality and professional standards. Additionally, professional journalists' associations fail to prescribe professional standards to protect the quality and reputation of the journalistic profession. The idea of professional standards for becoming a journalist is a polarizing issue. Some favor the introduction of licenses in various forms, while a more liberal segment of the media community thinks that ongoing training and professional development of journalists is more important than external standards.

There is also quite a strong trend of online journalism (portals, bloggers, social media journalism, etc.). More than half of Montenegrin citizens have access to the Internet, and development of Internet content is becoming more dynamic. There are no restrictions on access to online journalistic content.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Montenegro Objective Score: 1.85

The panelists unanimously believe that the professionalism of journalism in Montenegro has been steadily declining in quality for years, and that only a tiny part of the overall media community practices truly professional journalism. Both the panelists and the wider public believe that journalism is in crisis, and that the growing economic stagnation directly affects the quality of journalism. At the same time, journalism is fraught with political and commercial pressures, as well as internal corruption, all of which contribute to a less professional sector. Rabrenović stated, "In many media companies, journalists simply stopped checking their information or consulting additional relevant sources. This has resulted in the introduction of dubious journalistic forms, such as the 'commentary report' teeming with the author's subjectivity, or an interview that the interviewee repudiates. This results from media owners' steering their companies to serve political interests, both the government and the opposition."

Evaluating media coverage of recent political protests, Petar Komnenić, the editor of TV *Vijesti*, said, "Recent protests have revealed the dark side of Montenegrin journalism. The daily *Vijesti* was biased in its reporting, while MRTV quite unprofessionally did not report at all on the first stage of the protests." Branimir Mandić, a journalist at the daily *Vijesti*, said, "Our media, to younger generations, look boring, illiterate, and uninspiring. The NGO sector is

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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > 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 exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

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beginning to do investigative journalism. There are too many media in Montenegro, and they simply don't have either a professional or a commercial future." To make things worse, recent college graduates who studied journalism do not have professional knowledge and skills.

For more than a decade now, journalists in Montenegro have had a Code of Ethics, with norms for professional and ethical reporting aligned with international standards. However, like many other media agreements and legislation, the Code has not been well implemented. The clear decline of professionalism is the best indicator of journalists' lack of compliance with the Code. Rabrenović observed, "There is a Code of Journalist Ethics, which has been improved this year to align with international ethical standards. There is no specialized code or individual codes for different types of media. Standards are often seriously violated; media accuse each other of conducting racketeering or accepting gifts in exchange for biased reporting; so far none of the cases have been processed." Drobac said, "There is no self-regulatory body or Ethics Council, which could provide assessments of media compliance with ethical standards." Mandić added, "I became a journalist in 2005, and now everything is different. Before, there were debates about professionalism. The Montenegrin Media Institute had the best journalism school; it no longer exists. Today editorial rooms are empty, there are no debates, and overall the situation is bad."

The Code is not enforced by the Media Self-Regulatory Council, the sole and generally accepted self-regulatory body, due to perennial divisions and conflicts within the media community. Recently announced changes to the Code are unlikely to produce positive results if the Code itself remains generally ineffective and unenforced.

Montenegrin media offer numerous local, national, and international sources of information; online journalism is completely open. Rabrenović observed, "Journalists follow all the key events and topics; editors do not prevent them

from reporting on any of these events. We also have well-developed groups within social networks, where numerous public figures and citizens alike are quite active. We don't have many blogs in Montenegro, but citizens are active on the Internet." However, reporting on events is one thing; the quality of interpretation of those events is another. Lack of professionalism, the poor economic and social position of journalists, weak trade unions and professional organizations, and internal and external pressures on journalists have all resulted in a situation of clearly visible self-censorship. Depending on editorial policy, commercial and political interests and influences, self-censorship, and other relevant factors, the same events can be interpreted in completely different ways by different media.

Journalists' salaries in Montenegro are low and insufficient to make it an attractive profession. A small number of the best and most experienced journalists have salaries above €1,000. An average journalist's salary is about €400, which is less than the average nationwide income of €480. Journalist Predrag Zečević, of Portal Analitika, said, "Salaries are lower than in previous years, and often paid in two or three installments... There are an increasing number of journalists leaving the profession. The whole profession is being deformed and practically reduced to hiring interns." At the local level, Mladen Zadrima, editor-in-chief of Radio Cetinje, confirmed, "Salaries at the local Radio Cetinje are on average about €350." Media owners do not invest sufficient resources in the ongoing education of journalists or improving their standard of living. Overall, the profession has a low social status, there are no signs of economic recovery in journalists' salaries, and the low wages, in the long run, will result in a brain drain and further deterioration of the quality of journalism in Montenegro.

The number of jobs in the media industry is constantly falling; this year there were fewer than 3,000 employees in the media sector.

In terms of content, Montenegrin electronic and print media predominantly focus on commercial, entertainment, music, and sports programs. Only a handful of the 70 media companies in Montenegro have the organizational, financial, and personnel capacities to produce their own news and political programs. Media increasingly focus on entertainment, including primitive and sometimes tasteless reality shows, meaning that commercial interests have impinged upon the space for fully free media that operate in the public interest. It is ironic that some private media, sometimes with the support of NGOs, often care more about the public interest than national and local public service media, which is mired in the political interests of the ruling political circles.

The digital switchover is in its final stages in Montenegro. MRTV will soon start broadcasting with a digital system, and it will be the final leading television station to use a digital system. In addition, the growth of online media, combined with using modern communications tools, is making overall competition on the electronic media market stronger and more dynamic. Increasingly, online portals, the top three of which are Vijesti, CDM, and Portal Analitika, are becoming leaders in the media market.

Investigative and specialized reporting is also facing significant problems in the Montenegrin journalism sector. Zadrina said, “Within MRTV there is almost no investigative journalism. Private media that are critical of the government are trying to do something to the extent they are able. A good example was MRTV pompously announcing an investigative series about corruption in the construction sector, but nothing spectacular happened. Citizens didn’t learn anything they didn’t already know.” Additionally, most of the media companies do not have sufficient financial capacity nor sufficient interest to train and develop journalists in specialized areas.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Montenegro Objective Score: 2.44

For every 9,000 residents, there is one media company, which is above the European average (this is the same number of media companies as last year). Though the market is small, Montenegro has five national daily newspapers (*Vijesti*, *Dan*, *Pobjeda*, *Dnevne Novine*, and *Informer*) and five national television broadcasters (the public service broadcaster, MRTV, and private stations TV Vijesti, Prva TV, TV Pink, and TV Atlas). There are two national radio stations (the public service Radio Montenegro and the private Antenna M) and over 50 digital media sources at both the local and regional level. In recent years, Montenegro has experienced a strong growth of news portals, which are slowly pushing print media out of the market (especially *Vijesti*, *CDM*, and *Analitika*). In addition to traditional media, in recent years social media have been having a growing impact. Currently, for example, there are approximately 350,000 Facebook accounts in Montenegro.

Montenegrin media draw on news both from local and foreign news sources, including already published news in other local or foreign media. In Montenegro, as has been the case for several years, there is only one private news agency with limited capacities (MINA). An especially important source of information for international news—but also competition for Montenegrin media outlets—is media from neighboring ex-Yugoslav countries.

Plurality, however, is achieved through the large number of media outlets, rather than within almost all individual media outlets. Public media, as noted above, skew toward supporting the current government. Many private media companies are extremely biased in favor of the government, such as TV Pink and the daily *Informer*, while many other private media are anti-government, such as *Vijesti*, *Dan*, and *Monitor*.

Generally speaking, citizens’ access to national and international media is not legally restricted; however, there are economic barriers to accessibility of some media channels and sources of information. Vuković said, “Poverty seriously limits access to the media, especially online media and the press.” On the other hand, in Montenegro reputable international telecommunications companies are contributing to widespread access to cable television, ever-growing Internet penetration, an expansion of mobile telephony, and a gradual rise of social networks.

The most influential electronic and print media, as well as web portals, produce their own news programs. On the other hand, a small proportion of electronic media produce political or cultural programs, documentaries, or other forms of standalone content. Things are even worse off when it comes to local media, which are far less likely to produce their own news due to limited financial and human resources. At the same time, there is a powerful process of democratization of the media space by digital media initiatives, whether through Facebook, Twitter, blogs, or websites.

For many years now, government agencies have been required to make records available to the public. Because

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

of this, private company and media registers are readily available, and the data within are exposed to public scrutiny. Formal ownership structures, which are recorded in the public registers, are easily discernible online. However, the public often challenges these public records, claiming that they do not report the real owners. Zadrina said, "As far as I know, since 2013, no analyses of media ownership have been done. Data from the company registry will not give the full picture, as the real ownership structure can be much more complicated and usually linked to authorities." Last, the relevant agency still has not registered a single case of illegal media concentration.

As in previous years, the panelists agreed that media inadequately reflect the wide range of civic preferences and social interests in Montenegrin society. Editorial policies of Montenegrin media companies are in the hands of political and economic centers of power, which results in marginalization of the poor, as well as citizens without political or financial power. There are some positive examples, mainly related to cooperation between private media and NGOs committed to addressing the marginalized and repressed social or ethnic groups (Roma, LGBTQ, etc.). Overall, however, not all social interests are sufficiently reported, nor are the problems of various social and ethnic groups highlighted to the extent necessary.

There are pockets of quality journalism. Stojanović said, "Numerous local media are doing an excellent job when it comes to issues within their communities. There are numerous local communities' chronicles informing the citizens and reporting from different sectors. With web portals, citizens in local communities have much easier access to information." The general conclusion of the panelists is that Montenegrin media outlets are trying to publish news of local, national, or international significance. Therefore, it can be argued that some local media, following their editorial policies, do report on relevant local, national, and international issues. It also can be said that the Montenegrin public has access to the most important information: news about key local, national, or global events. The plurality of local and international media and the broad availability of information sources alone make it impossible to conceal any significant news or events.

Montenegro clearly has media pluralism, but the panelists agree that this plurality does not translate into quality or journalistic credibility. The main issue is the dominance of entertainment, cheap populism, sports, and musical content; media that produce original news and political, cultural, or educational programming represent a tiny minority.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Montenegro Objective Score: 1.96

The mere number of media in Montenegro is not an indicator of successful business operations. Even with a slowly strengthening economy throughout the country, media business in Montenegro remains unprofitable and barely sustainable. Their survival is possible because of low operating costs, low-paid journalists, the reliance on content produced by others, and external financial support coming from either owners or national and local authorities' budgets. Private media still struggle with financial difficulties, resulting in low employment in the sector, while public media survive only thanks to budgetary support from national and local authorities.

Numerous public broadcasting services operate (two national and a dozen local) and enjoy stable budgetary support by the national government and local councils. On top of that, public media have an unfair advantage in the advertising market, which threatens the operations and survival of private media companies. Commercial advertising revenues in Montenegro are approximately €10 million annually; this low figure has a huge negative impact on media sustainability.

MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

There are approximately 70 media companies, both national and local, and this large number has a significant negative impact on the commercial sustainability and business prospects of the private media. Furthermore, media companies typically suffer from poor professionalism: politically biased and tendentious editorial policies; biased reporting, even including hate speech; poor data protection, etc. Overall, these factors mean that it is very difficult to manage a media business in Montenegro and develop value in the eyes of the audience.

Media derive revenue in different ways, which are difficult to discern. Zadrina said, "There is a rule of the thumb that you do not criticize the one who is paying you, although by not doing so we violate the public's right to know." According to Drobac, "Advertising money is insufficient to ensure viability; therefore, the big question is how media companies are securing the rest of the funds necessary for media operations." Vuković said, "Public media, at both the national and local level, do not have sufficient funding sources to have independent editorial policies. When it comes to private media, editorial policies are subject to the owners' interests and not the public's interest."

The trends in advertising revenue from previous years continue. Montenegro's advertising market for many years now has been part of a broader regional market; about €10 million annually flows into Montenegro. It is estimated that there is another advertising market worth about €2 million, deriving from the advertising budgets of national and local authorities. As in previous years, over 80 percent of advertising budgets go through market-dominating advertising agencies, while the rest of the advertising budget is negotiated directly between individual companies and the media. Advertising agencies concentrate mainly on private media with national coverage and less on national public service MRTV. Local media make marginal advertising revenues. Assessing the advertising market situation, Markešić noted, "Relative to the size of the market, we have a lot of advertising agencies. Telecommunications operators are the biggest advertisers on the market, and they, like most of the other clients, are advertising in line with their objectives. Media companies set the prices. Advertising at MRTV is not prohibited, but it is less than that of private media. Local media and small private media are far less covered by commercial advertisers' plans. The market is dominated by branch offices of big regional advertising companies."

Zadrina said, "There is a rule of the thumb that you do not criticize the one who is paying you, although by not doing so we violate the public's right to know."

There is strong competition among media for the advertising market, and advertisers are motivated by media ratings. At the moment, the best-rated television station in Montenegro is privately owned TV Pink, followed by the private TV Vijesti; national public service broadcaster MRTV ranks third. Almost 90 percent of commercial advertisers' money goes to four television stations (the three top-rated stations and TV Prva). Only 6 percent of the total advertising budget goes to online advertising. *Dan* editor Rajka Raičević noted, "Media act in line with market rules. Private media live from circulation and marketing. Public media have an advantage, as they receive money from the public budget, and government institutions prefer to advertise through those media." Advertising from national and local government agencies and public companies make up an estimated 17 percent of the overall advertising budget, demonstrating political influence via advertising. Government institutions prefer to advertise in publically owned media (national and local public services) or favor private media that are friendly toward (or at least not critical of) the ruling structures.

Market surveys to support media business planning are rare. Since news companies are barely surviving or are barely profitable, they do not have budgets to pay for relevant market research. Markešić said, "[The year] 2014 was particularly bad, because no surveys were done for any of the media companies, nor did we have relevant data on ratings and circulation. In 2015, we witnessed huge changes in TV ratings, because our agency (Direct Media) got a new system, which is as close as possible to using a people-meter system. It is a hybrid system able to cross daily surveys with audience demographic data, with data on programming and TV ratings in units of minutes and seconds. These data are being collected at all times from IPTV boxes of Montenegrin Telecom. This method for measuring ratings represents a huge step forward from all previous measurement systems. It also represents the most objective source of information on TV ratings we have ever had in the Montenegrin market."

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Montenegro Objective Score: 2.17

It has become a common perception that media trade associations are weak and without significant impact. Confrontations and bitter rivalries within the media community prevent the establishment of a meaningful trade association, which in turn has negative implications for the media sector's legal status and potential business achievements. The voice of the business community is silent, which remains a major concern for policymakers and media entrepreneurs.

The professional journalism associations appear to parallel the situation of the media trade associations; journalists do not have strong associations and thus little impact within the network of Montenegrin professional associations. There have been some developments in media trade union organizing, but this has not yet led to stronger social and legal protection of journalists. The apparent disintegration of the professional media community has made journalism less and less of a respectable and influential profession. Vuković said, "Formally, there are several journalists' associations, but they are mostly inactive and their influence is very limited both in terms of journalists' protection and the issue of improving professional standards. Most reporters and editors who represent the best this profession has to offer in Montenegro are not members of any professional associations." Looking on the bright side, Aprcović noted, "The Media Self-regulation Council monitors and reports on the violations of the Code of Journalists.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, cable, Internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

There are a number of media that are not members of that organization but have internal ombudspersons who protect the rights of readers and viewers."

The panelists agree that NGOs' activities are very important for the democratic development of society in general and the empowerment of civil society in particular. In the past 15 years, a respectable nongovernmental sector, which has impact in a number of social areas, has grown up in Montenegro. For example, certain NGOs have become an essential part of the broader political process, monitoring the parliamentary elections. In principle, NGOs cooperate well with the media; together, they form a key part of organized civil society in Montenegro.

However, Rabrenović noted, "Local NGOs, just like the media, are divided along political lines, and they cooperate only with related NGOs. We also have nontransparent NGOs; for these, we don't know who is financing them. NGOs can be established freely—they participate in consultations on draft legislation, in the work of the parliament by monitoring and taking part in the work of the parliamentary committees; they are members of the National Anti-Corruption Commission and the Commission for Prevention of Violence Against Journalists."

In recent years, training journalists has been largely reduced to the academic and theoretical teaching at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Podgorica, Department of Journalism. However, these academics lack practical knowledge and skills; journalists have nowhere to undergo hands-on training. This has devastating repercussions on the younger generation of journalists in Montenegro. The Montenegro Media Institute, once a leader in the education and practical training of journalists, has lost both its status and the support of the media community. This has inflicted damage on the media who were counting on the academic development of professional junior staff. Vuković commented, "In Montenegro, for a decade now, we have the Department of Journalism at the Faculty of Political Sciences, but the quality of studies is rather low, especially recently, due to a lack of quality teaching staff. A huge problem is that there is not enough space for hands-on training within curricula. Furthermore, students who complete their studies are not interested in becoming interns in media companies; instead they go to NGOs." The younger generations trained as journalists not only are poorly trained, but they are also increasingly indifferent to the challenges of the profession; this is a serious obstacle to the future reputation of journalism.

There are no restrictions or a monopoly on procuring equipment for print media. The problem lies in the irrationality of the leading print media (for example, the

dailies *Vijesti*, *Dan*, and *Dnevne Novine*): each have their own printing equipment, and each one of these printing presses could serve the needs of a much larger market than that of Montenegro.

All distribution companies are privately owned, and there is adequate competition in terms of open distribution channels. The exception is for print media, which rely on a single dominant distributor who owns a network of stores nationwide.

In recent years, Montenegro's IT and telecommunications infrastructure has improved, reaching western European standards. The recently completed digitalization process, which included even the national public broadcasting service, enabled almost all Montenegrin households to be covered by the digital signal. In the near future, it is realistic to expect the further development of IT infrastructure and an increase in potential users. Commenting on this issue, Markešić said, "IT and communications technology is at a satisfactory level. With the completion of the digitalization process, even the small number of households that weren't using digital platforms are now enjoying the benefits of a well-developed digital infrastructure. Internet penetration is growing, as is especially broadband access. Mobile telephony is covering almost the entire territory of Montenegro, and I dare say that almost all adults and a lot of minors have mobile phones."

List of Panel Participants

- Ljiljana Savic**, editor-in-chief, MRTV, Podgorica
- Branimir Mandić**, columnist, *Vijesti*, Podgorica
- Predrag Zečević**, journalist, Analitika.me, Podgorica
- Petar Komnenić**, deputy editor-in-chief, TV Vijesti, Podgorica
- Milena Aprcović**, journalist, Radio Antena M, Podgorica
- Dragan Markešić**, general manager, Direct Media Montenegro, Podgorica
- Jadranka Rabrenović**, journalist, *Pobjeda*, Podgorica
- Dorđe Stojanović**, director, student radio KRŠ, Podgorica
- Mladen Zadrima**, editor-in-chief, Radio Cetinje, Cetinje
- Samir Rastoder**, journalist, *Dnevne Novine*, Podgorica
- Duško Vuković**, independent media analyst, Podgorica
- Rajka Raičević**, journalist, *Dan*, Podgorica
- Sonja Drobac**, editor-in-chief, TV Prva, Podgorica
- Ranko Vujović**, president, Agency for Electronic Media, Podgorica

Moderator

- Vladan Simonovic**, partner, Media Ltd, Podgorica

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