Media culture and professionalism in reporting on minority issues in Bulgaria: Practices and problems

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the article is to discuss the regulatory and self-regulatory approaches to the media in Bulgaria having an impact on professional reporting on minorities' issues and encouraging intercultural dialogue among various social and ethnic groups. As an element of democratic transition, the formation of a new media culture and attitude towards minorities in the country is a long and complicated process combining legal and media components. One of the expected positive outcomes of the transformations taking place has been the creation of truly independent and professional media that can successfully exercise their public integrating function. The text analyzes different national research projects and publications in the field. The final section is dedicated to the experience of the national minority press and the two national public broadcasters — the BNR and the BNT — featuring their problems and achievements.

KEYWORDS: minorities, media, media culture, democracy, intercultural dialogue, media self-regulation

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INTRODUCTION: MEDIA, DEMOCRATIC CHANGES AND DIALOGUE

Media and minorities represent two fundamental notions of modern pluralist democratic societies. Nowadays, these societies require common spaces where different perspectives on the public good can be freely voiced with the Internet being an example of a space where robust exchange of ideas is taking place (Baker, 2002). The key value of freedom of expression and its crucial role for the enjoyment of all human rights are major prerequisites for overcoming tension and solving conflicts through meaningful dialogue. In this respect the quality of public discourse and its impact on democratic changes depend greatly on the media and its performance (Barendt, 2005).

Within the present dynamic social context an important element of the public function of the media — to stimulate intercultural dialogue and to work consistently

for cohesion in society — particularly stands out. Ethical journalism presenting fairly the accomplishments of all members of society and thoroughly implementing intercultural competences can be a powerful positive factor resulting in social harmony and understanding (Kirilov, 2006). The opposite is also true because biased media performance and suppression of minority and marginal voices can lead to the disruption of social peace and eventually could severely undermine social efforts.

The democratic changes in Bulgaria combining legal and media components is a long and complicated process which in detail comprises not only the adoption of legal acts but also the struggle of civil society for the entrenchment of human and ethical values in the social fabric. One of the expected positive outcomes of this manifold process has been the creation of truly independent and professional media that can successfully exercise their public integrating function.

The purpose of this article is to analyze this part of the process of transition which is related to the way minorities and their problems are treated by the media and the national experiences that have been developed for fostering ethical and responsible behavior. The text discusses regulatory and self-regulatory approaches impacting reporting on minorities' issues and encouraging intercultural dialogue. The involvement of civil society and its contribution to the improvement of media performance is also examined as a powerful factor for deliberation and advancement at various levels.

There are different types of minorities in liberal societies — ethnic, racial, religious, gender, generation, etc. united by common values and goals (Heywood, 2007; Kymlicka, 1995; Charvet & Kaczynska-Nay, 2008) and the media representation of each of them deserves a separate study. The article will focus primarily on ethnic minorities but in some places will refer to the problems of other minorities (religious, gender) as well.

Bulgarians represent the majority of the population in Bulgaria (84.8 percent), while the main ethnic minority groups are the Bulgarian Turks and Roma. Other smaller ethnic groups consist of Russians, Armenians, Vlachs, Jews, etc. The largest religious minority are Mohammedans/Muslims and include Bulgarian ethnic Turks, part of Bulgarian Roma and some 200,000 Bulgarians (so-called Pomaks). According to national statistics East Orthodox Christians comprise 85.6 percent of the population, second place is occupied by Muslims with 10.2 percent and in third place are people belonging to the Catholic faith — 0.6 percent.

Under Bulgarian legislation there is no legal definition of a minority, no matter what type of minority we bear in mind. After the democratic transformations in the country the international body of norms serves as a main source of inspiration for the establishment of an appropriate domestic framework which regulates the rights of persons belonging to different linguistic, religious or ethnic groups in conformity with widely accepted principles and values. Bulgaria is a party to all important international and regional instruments related to the regulation of the rights of

minorities which represent the minimum standard of human rights requirements for state parties.

DEMOCRATIC REFORMS AND MEDIA SELF-REGULATION AND CULTURE

The reforms in the media field in all Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries were not carried out without greater or lesser complications. Many researchers and scholars have pointed to the fragility and formality of the established democratic institutions being a result of the lack or inadequacy of democratic culture. Further, the absence of tolerance in the political realm as a precondition for the establishment of culture of tolerance and non-violence was explicitly underlined (Spichal, 1994; Price et al., 2002, pp. 255–256).

Recently, academic sources have also asserted the persistent problems concerning mutual respect among social groups in the new democratic states. As mentioned in the follow-up monitoring reports *Television across Europe. More channels, less independence* (2008), prepared by the Open Society Institute for the situation in Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, FYR Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia, sweeping changes in the television landscape due to technological proliferation and convergence have specific features in the transitional states of CEE. These features, however, do not promise a rosy future in the era of digitization. Regulatory inertia, decreasing control, re-politicization of public service media and media authorities, concentration of media ownership, less diversity of programs and plummeting quality of content are almost wide-spread (OSI, 2008, pp. 20–21). The same document emphasizes the fact that minority programming continues to be a priority for public service broadcasters but in most cases the time devoted to such programs is insufficient and is scheduled in the least viewed hours.

Media transition in Bulgaria was carried out in parallel with the political transition which started on 10 November 1989. It was controversial in many respects and some scientists explain it as a shallow construction emulating reality, arguing that instead of carrying out genuine democratic reforms the elites were only pretending doing that (Minev & Kabakchieva, 1996; cited in Spassov, 2000). Though slowly and with a lot of twists, the transformation of the Bulgarian media system brought forth such changes as the creation of a public and commercial media system, significant diversification of the media landscape and a new regulatory framework in which co- and self-regulation supplemented regulation. However, these positive developments became real much later than in other CEE countries and this fact has had its bearing on national media culture.

Coming to the public scene after years of chaos and uncertainty the broadcasting law and regulatory body did not become really efficient from the outset. Ethical journalistic standards were "imported" in Bulgaria in 2004 following the BBC model and the Ethics Code was presented to the public at a solemn but problematic

ceremony attended by the owners of the big newspapers, the president, the prime minister and the speaker of the parliament (Tabakova, 2008).

Theorists dealing with media culture and performance after the democratic changes notice that sensationalism and tabloidization have outweighed objectivity and critical attitude. While newspapers, radio and television were overpoliticized during the first years of the transition, later on it was commercialization in the media that dominated over serious critical analysis. Aggressive journalistic behavior was, and is, not uncommon. Specific journalistic language has reflected these modifications in the social environment and eclectic style, jargon and colloquialisms represent the norm of expression (Spassov, 2000). Under these conditions, discussions of issues touching deeply on intercultural relationships and tolerance have been sporadic and relevant topics in this regard have been wittingly or unwittingly avoided.

The Radio and Television Act passed in 1998 and amended many times, the last amendment being in 2009 to attune it to the requirements of the European Audiovisual Media Services Directive, contains many provisions against racism and xenophobia in the media and more particularly obliging media service providers to respect social peace, understanding and the diversity of cultural traditions. However, judging by the frequency of their implementation or by their popularity among media professionals, they have remained as sheer declarations. Compared to ethical rules these norms are much more elaborate but the lack of consistent regulatory practice has sapped their potential. The current broadcasting regulator created in 2001 — the Council for the Electronic Media (CEM) — which is authorized to control how the audiovisual media services operators fulfill their obligations under the law, including their obligations to promote a culture of tolerance, has tried to respond to the needs of the various minorities and to foster pluralism. According to its members, the body has made efforts to enhance the diversity of regional channels and programs. Unfortunately, due to the lack of funding or professional staff most of these channels and programs have ceased to exist, thus depriving the national media system of the opportunity to develop a solid multi-ethnic dimension through a network of local and regional stations.

As an administrative body the CEM makes use of its controlling competence to counteract intolerance and particularly hate speech by using its power of impact — to suspend or revoke the license or to impose administrative penalties for the violation of the law. According to experts from the "Monitoring" Directorate, it has been more difficult to establish cases of direct discrimination in the media presentation as compared to examples of more subtle dubious conduct which does not fall within the scope of a specific legal provision. Such forms of discriminatory speech or messages of hatred can be considered as a modification of traditional open discriminatory statements, they represent so-called "instigation to intolerance" and should be subject to further analysis and evaluation.

According to records for 2002–2008, the CEM imposed seven penal decrees for the protection of the inviolability of citizens, five for programs suggestive of

ethnic intolerance, three for programs suggestive of political intolerance, two penal decrees suggestive of religious intolerance and two suggestive of intolerance in general. These figures illustrate that the regulatory authority has been quite cautious when exercising its power to impose administrative penalties in ethnic or religious cases. At the end of 2005 the CEM adopted an opinion about good morals in society directed against violence in the media. Media professionals considered it an expression of censorship and publicly censured and rejected it. After such strong opposition from the profession, the regulator withdrew the opinion which was a heavy blow to its credibility and reputation.

An important component of the complex controlling function of any regulatory authority is the information function through which public awareness is raised on a particular publicly relevant topic. In 2009 the CEM organized a public discussion dedicated to hate speech and the language of hatred in the electronic media, in partnership with the association of the Bulgarian commercial operators (Association of Broadcasting and Radio Operators — ABBRO) and the Union of the Bulgarian National Electronic Media. The position of the regulator was that the problems engendered by hate speech in the public sphere can be settled by the common efforts of the media profession and civil society, and public and professional discussion on this crucial issue should be ongoing.

In contrast to this declaration stands the real situation. Notwithstanding the fact that the public expects that debates on the hot issue of hate speech in the electronic media should also encompass the new media and more specifically the Internet and should be held in a regular manner, this has not happened so far. The CEM has been silent in many cases where the public expected its clear and competent position. Some of its decisions posed again the problem of differentiation between various types of speech and elaboration of clear-cut criteria when freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination are balanced. In such situations it is pertinent to recall the European Court of Human Rights' thoughts from the *Handyside case* (1976) that freedom of expression is applicable "not only to 'information' or 'ideas' that are favorably received but also to 'those that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population.'" The decisions of the CEM are often perceived as controversial, provoking further comments about political bias and business capture of the body.

Despite the possibilities for regulatory impact, self-regulation is considered a more effective mechanism for encouraging impartial and accountable media performance fostering dialogue and understanding in society. This observation proves all the more true in the digital environment when new information and communication technologies provide new tools for exchange and public accountability. The main functions of the two ethics commissions at the National Council for Journalistic Ethics were to monitor the implementation of the Ethics Code of the Bulgarian Media (2004) respectively, in the print and electronic media, to adjudicate on disputes between the media and the public, to stimulate public debate on the issues of journalistic ethics and to promote high morals and professional standards.

In 2008 the Commission of Ethics in the Press passed a recommendation on the way of reporting with respect to ethnic, religious and other communities. The document recalls the definition of discrimination incorporated in the Ethics Code and underscores the traditional tolerance existing between various communities in Bulgarian society. It also reminds the rights and duties under the Bulgarian Constitution of any person, no matter what his racial, ethnic or religious background is. According to the recommendation, in some periods of the development of Bulgarian journalism, there have been cases of "hate speech," in which one or another ethnic group has been involved. However, the safety and security of these groups has never been put at risk (harmful consequences). The document rightly points out that most of the cases called "demonstrations of hate speech" were factually demonstrations of poor journalistic culture and lack of competence. It stresses the importance of media self-regulation and calls on state bodies to abstain from encroachment on the media and imposition of censorship. The document defends freedom of expression, bringing to the fore the most important principles of free and accountable journalism. The problem is that the scope of the document is limited, as the principles are valid for the media which have signed the Ethics Code only. Notwithstanding the fact that the recommendation sounds timely and correct, there is no information at all about its practical value.

Under a recent amendment in the radio and television act, the decisions of the ethics commissions are mandatory for the traditional media, and in cases where they were not complied with the CEM can impose monetary sanctions. However, it remains a dead letter for the time being due to controversies in the Union of Publishers of Bulgaria, which is one of the founders of the National Council for Journalistic Ethics and the establishment of an alternative union of publishers. The newly created union announced that it would enlarge its membership, covering not only print and broadcasting media but also advertising agencies. One of its goals would be the drafting of a new ethical code for its members. Pending this development the existing self-regulatory mechanism has ceased to exist and the operation of the ethics commissions, the mandates of which have expired in the meantime , has been suspended. It remains unclear whether the new self-regulatory structure once created, will follow the practice and refer to the documents adopted by its predecessor.

These difficulties in the application of media self-regulation in general and the lack of understanding and sensitivity towards minorities issues in particular, are the reasons why the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) and other civil society organizations are still critical of the media and their attitude towards various groups in the country. The general opinion is that media outlets are not the best mediators of public debate and they are not fully committed to the promotion of culture of tolerance and social peace (BHC, 2008). Another document — *the Report on the State of Interethnic Relationships and Intercultural Dialogue, the Actions against Racist and Xenophobic Behavior and the Development of the Demographic Processes in the Republic of Bulgaria of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues at the Council of Ministers* (March 2008) underlines the significant progress in reflecting the

achievements of various communities made in principle by the national media, but it also emphasizes the fact that still there are considerable flaws in the general media contribution to the fight against intolerance. The conclusion of the authors of the report sounds disappointing — if minorities represent 15 percent of the population of the country, their presence in the media is minuscule and amounts to only 1–3 percent!

Stereotypes in media reporting constitute a huge impediment for the objective coverage of the life of minorities and genders (Popova et al., 2008). The image of women in the media is to a large extent impoverished and one-dimensional because of the stereotyped images both in programs and in the advertisements.

Stereotypes are widespread and clichés in the media are so common that they do not bother anybody. Publications about Roma for instance, follow two well-known trends — they either link Roma people with criminality, poverty and violence or with their holidays, traditions and music. The life of the Turkish minority is associated predominantly with politics and particularly with the activities of its party — the Rights and Liberties Movement. With some exceptions there is no convincing media picture of the aspirations of this minority group. By and large minority groups are either neglected or their representatives shown as negative examples. In the same context refugees, migrants and asylum seekers are also subjected to prejudice and racism, which is most widespread across Internet forums. The mass image of members of this social community is that they are lazy and aggressive towards society. Quite often their life does not attract media attention. Factually the group of refugees and asylum seekers is not a homogeneous one and every subgroup possesses specific characteristics — traditions, lifestyles, social aspirations. What matters for social inclusion is that people from the majority have to be aware of the difficulties these people encounter in the process of their adaptation to and integration in society, but these problems usually do not fall within the scope of public debate. The contribution of refugees and asylum seekers to economic growth and to cultural diversity are other aspects that deserve more in-depth media analysis as required by the PACE Recommendation 1768(2006) "The image of asylum seekers, migrants and refugees in the media." Such perspectives that make people think about common problems have to be more often pursued in media debates and made popular in public discourse.

Stereotypes are most often used to construct the image of gay, lesbian and transgender persons (GLT). Experts claim that tolerance towards people demonstrating different sexual orientation practically means marginalization of their problems (Pisankaneva, 2005). The media secure limited space for discussion on GLT issues sufficient to keep them in the periphery of public attention. Homosexuality is depicted as an unalienable component either of show business or of politics. The report *Bulgaria: The status of lesbian, gay and transgender rights submission to the UN human rights council for its universal periodic review of Bulgaria, 9th session*[1] alarms that

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[1] Retrieved February 18, 2013 from http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session9/BG/LGBT_LesbianGayBisexualTransexualAssociation.pdf.

GLT people continue to face discrimination and exclusion in Bulgaria, though the Act against Discrimination bans discrimination on any grounds. There is little representative and reliable information about GLT people and almost no research and monitoring mechanisms in relation to GLT issues. Mostly tabloids deal with the problems of homosexuals and because of this or due to the general negligence towards the life of this social group the media sustain a general negative attitude towards them.

In recent years xenophobic media like the newspapers *Ataka* and *Nova Zora* and the private TV channel SKAT TV which became the major media outlet for *Ataka* for the last parliamentary elections in 2009, as well as subsequently, appeared on the national media scene. Through the performance of these media, xenophobia was reinforced in social relationships and legitimized in the public sphere. In addition to presentation of nationalist xenophobic media channels, examples of incitement to hatred and discrimination against ethnic minorities and foreigners are not infrequent in the other media as well.

NATIONAL MEDIA PRACTICES — ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTROVERSIES. THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

The Comments of the Government of Bulgaria on the *Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in Bulgaria*, prepared in 2005 for discussion by the Rapporteur Group on Human Rights at the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (GR-H), provide interesting information about the measures taken by Bulgaria in order to meet its obligations as a member to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. As stated, governmental efforts have aimed on the one hand, at

> "improving the general status of all persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, who are objectively in a disadvantaged position, in particular the Roma, with the aim of achieving full and effective equality of opportunity in the economic, social, political and cultural sphere" and on the other hand, "ensuring the necessary conditions for the citizens of Bulgaria belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to preserve and develop their culture and to maintain the essential elements of their identity (religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage)."

The media is considered a key-factor for the accomplishment of these objectives.

Print media

In 2000 non-governmental organizations collected data serving as evidence for the existence of two Roma newspapers, four magazines and one bulletin and two Turkish newspapers in Bulgaria. In 2004–2005 three Roma newspapers, one Roma magazine, four Turkish magazines, three Turkish newspapers are reported as being available. Such editions have always encountered hardships such as lack of

resources — financial, organizational, etc. The limited funds which are at the disposal of ethnic communities and the insufficient number of donors are considered basic reasons for their uncertain position. These are all conclusions which one can find in the book *The Ethnic Press in Bulgaria*, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Sofia, 2000 (in Bulgarian). The book presents the results of a sociological survey "The Ethnic Press in Bulgaria" carried out by the BHC with the help of the Agency "Market Test" and the Bulgarian Media Coalition.

From a content perspective it will be interesting to know how the main topics are graded in the ethnic editions — most of the publications are focused on the history of the communities, of less importance are the issues discussing the activities of their organizations, then the themes of culture, folklore and traditions follow and the final places are occupied by examples of discriminatory, racist, xenophobic and violent behavior towards minorities. These issues rank differently in the editions belonging to various ethnic communities, for instance, the topic about racism and xenophobia is most often treated in Roma and Armenian ethnic publications, while the issues of the protection of human rights are the most popular ones in Roma and Turkish editions.

Most of the editions after being in operation for a short time have gone bust. The economic crisis has impacted negatively on the print media in the country and it has further augmented the problems of local, regional and minority press. This has had a negative effect on press pluralism and diversity.

Radio

Intercultural dialogue and understanding among various communities represent an unalienable part of the policy and programming of the Bulgarian National Radio. As a national public media operator the BNR has followed a long tradition of serving multiculturalism in Bulgarian society and has elaborated its own original approach to minorities' issues.

Radio Bulgaria is the world service of Bulgarian radio, which presents its cultural and national identity to the world. It is a principal source of information from and about Bulgaria for millions of listeners outside its borders. Turkish language programs target the population of Turkish ethnic origin in the regions where this population predominantly lives — to the North East and to the South and South East of Bulgaria. Intended to meet the needs of its young audience, expecting quality and easily accessible information and entertainment at all times and wishing to facilitate and intensify communication via modern information technologies, Radio Bulgaria created its "Radio Bulgaria Internet Website" Service. The Christo Botev Channel is another channel of the BNR that broadcasts a variety of programs for minorities in the country. Though the programming of the channel is complex and is subject to criticism for being too complicated and overloaded with information, its inquisitive spirit, cultural breadth and topicality of presentation

distinguish it from other media outlets. The broadcasts target different minority groups and combine treatment of universal issues with more specific topics. An overarching dimension of all programs is the European theme ("Europe without borders" is the name of a special educational program). Minority and social issues are intertwined in the overall programming. Different broadcasts put the emphasis on different problems, no matter what type of minority they belong to — some focus on the culture of minority groups, others on their lifestyle and relationships with the majority. The aim is to entrench the spirit of tolerance within society and to help its members overcome their prejudices towards the other and otherness. A new trend in broadcasting policy is to tackle the themes of autochthonic as well as of newly formed minorities. The integration of new minority groups — their adaptation to Bulgarian society, becoming proficient in the Bulgarian language, finding a job and a suitable school for their children — these are the themes particularly accentuated. The emphasis normally is put on intercultural dialogue, tolerance and the preservation of cultural identity.

Some of the initiatives of the BNR rely on a more dynamic cross cultural approach extending beyond the typical media performance. In it various arts are intertwined with intensive interpersonal communication. The youth festivals "Alarm Fest" represent mixes of various cultural genres and styles which aim at boosting cultural contacts among Balkan peoples. The program "Known and unknown" has launched a similar project combining discussions about tolerance and multiculturalism with literary arts through the organization of an annual poetical competition for blind people, "Seeing hearts." The competition gains popularity not only among special segments of the population but along the audience at large.

A good example of a pro-active approach aimed at changing the general attitude towards the most vulnerable and problematic social groups is the program prepared by journalists from the "Hristo Botev" channel, dedicated to the problems of persons suffering from mental illnesses, in which for the first time, several women are telling live their stories in their own voices.

Among the commercial radio outlets, one of the biggest private radio stations in the country which broadcasts nationwide — *Darik Radio* disseminates its own regional programme in Turkish, which at present is being broadcast from the town of Kurdzhali.

Television

Since 2010 the social slot of the BNT has merged the two specialized programs targeting ethnic minorities — "From the Roma world" and "Together." All topics are integrated in a new social and current affairs program, "Little stories." It comprises the broadcasting of short documentaries focusing on the life and problems of the Roma community, featuring different aspects of their life. Social and personal perspectives are intertwined to draw public attention to evils like poverty and

social exclusion, or to encourage examples of integration and professional success. Though depicting vividly and emotionally the world of "little" suffering persons, the ratings of the program are very low — 0.5 percent only. What most people do not like about the program is its overall pessimistic tone, concentration on criminality and poverty within the Roma (eventually, the repetition of well-known stereotypes). The universal message of humanism needs a more optimistic tone of presentation based on commonly cherished ideals that can provoke better understanding and support for these communities.

On Saturdays the BNT broadcasts the program "Faith and society" which focuses on Orthodox culture as an element of modern culture and discusses the problems of spirituality and beliefs with members of faith communities living in Bulgaria — Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, Armenians and Jews. Participants inform the audience about the diversity of traditions and customs not only in the country but in the world as well. Another objective of the program is to promote interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence among various religions in Bulgaria. Religious programs are generally scant in the Bulgarian media landscape and the topics related are only sporadically discussed.

The discussions concerning the news in Turkish, broadcast by the BNT, became a controversial item on the public agenda reflecting political and media ambitions of different parties. The launch of the program dates back to the time after the adoption of the Radio and Television Bill in 1998 and the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2000. Then the BNT and the BNR were mandated to disseminate programs in the mother tongue of various ethnic communities. However, so far there have been no news programs in the languages of other minorities living in the country.

Before the elections in 2009 the cable television channel "Skat," a stronghold of the nationalist Ataka party, started collecting signatures in favor of the proposal to revoke the broadcasting of the news in Turkish by Bulgarian National Television. The proposition was also strongly supported by Ataka and reflected in its party program before the general elections in 2009. After the GERB party won the elections in 2009 and Ataka announced at first its support for the newly structured government, its members raised the proposal of a national referendum to be held on the issue. In 2011, while participating in the popular talk show "Tempora and Mores" on Nova TV (Channel 3) the Prime-Minister of Bulgaria, Boyko Borissov, shared an opinion that the removal of the news in Turkish from the national public channel would cause more harm than good to society.

Opponents to the proposal pinpointed the international human rights obligations of Bulgaria as a Council of Europe and European Union member, as well as a party to the FCPNM. They recalled that before taking off the news in Turkish from the BNT program, two necessary procedural steps had to be undertaken — first to change the radio and television law and second to amend the license of the BNT. Some experts viewed the issue as an element of a wider exchange of opinions

focused on the discharge of the public service remit of the national TV broadcaster. That is why they suggested an emphasis to be put on the restructuring of the media activities of the BNT to include the launch of a separate channel targeting diverse regions and minority groups. In fact, the second channel of the BNT started operating in 2011 but contrary to mass expectations, it did not focus predominantly on diversity, cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

The debate concerning the appropriateness of broadcasting of news in Turkish by the BNT is not in the spotlight for the time being, but far from over. In fact, any nationalistic party can raise the issue and try to turn it into a national bone of contention. Apparently, the problem at stake is to a large extent of a political and populist complexion. It is artificially created and hampers a much more meaningful exchange on more topical themes such as a new media law, the remit of the public media in the digital environment and the genuine contribution of the media to intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.

CONCLUSIONS

The coverage of minorities' issues and the regular dialogue among different communities in Bulgarian media are uneven and far from satisfactory. The interference of nationalistic parties and the xenophobic position of the media sponsored by them, exacerbate the problems in this respect. Comparing the presentations of media outlets, it is apparent that public media have the necessary experience and resources to reflect consistently and professionally on the life and everyday needs of various minority groups. Building on its long professional tradition in the area, the attempts of the BNR to open new opportunities for fruitful interaction between various arts and genres for boosting diversity and dialogue nationally and internationally, merit attention. The public expects more interesting and original programming from the BNT, especially in new formats carried by new platforms and services online. Broadcasts that rely on interactivity and intense communication with young viewers and listeners to foster dialogue and cohesion in society are much needed in the novel media environment.

By and large the media has to perform its public function within the breadth of a modern media function, encompassing not only traditional media tasks (to inform, to educate and to entertain) but offering much more culture, analysis and education. In an era of globalization, this means a multidimensional and open dialogue among cultures, religions and traditions and an in-depth frank analysis of such dark phenomena of our age as terrorism, extremism and racism (White, 2008, pp. 94–104). Public service media should be at the vanguard of this manifold but highly relevant process.

These aspects point to the complex character of the policy and legal framework which should be elaborated with the participation of all stakeholders, including the media themselves, as well as their regulatory and self-regulatory bodies. More

surveys and research in the field have to be carried out to serve as a sound basis of such a wide framework. Common problems concerning hate speech and discrimination in the region, for instance, can be tackled by concerted efforts and close cooperation. One of the conclusions of the conference organized by the Council of Europe under the title "Living together: Combating hate speech in South Eastern Europe" which took place in Sarajevo in November 2011, calls for a broader approach for "the promotion of dialogue (intercultural and cross-frontier), networking and the exchange of experiences among civil society organizations, investigative and judiciary agencies, the media and the academic community from the countries of South-Eastern Europe; the aim of which would be to create joint actions and develop mechanisms for combating hate speech in the public domain" (Zivjeti zajedno, 2011, p. 97).

In the new information and communications environment self-regulatory practices have to be more dynamic and respond to the new challenges which discrimination and stereotyping pose. They have to result in greater accountability and transparency, particularly of the new media. The Internet should be the main forum for the exposure of bad practices and for the promotion of good practices regarding tolerance, pluralism and integration. Strengthening of media education and close collaboration between the faculties of journalism and the media with the active involvement of public service media to improve the quality of content and promote debate, are other crucial steps for the accomplishment of a vibrant media culture of dialogue and understanding.

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