

Transparent scientific work  
UDK 316.774(497.11)  
DOI 10.7251/MFP1701107S  
COBISS.RS-ID 6752280

# OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE AND MEDIA CONTROL IN SERBIA

Sanja Stankov<sup>1</sup>, Aleksandar Rakić<sup>2</sup>, Jasmina Bajić<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Who are the media owners in Serbia? It could be a rewarding question in various quizzes of knowledge. Because the ownership of many public media in the country is not a public matter. Corruption in the media itself prevents objective information and public oversight of social activities. But without the media, there is no effective fight against corruption. When government control over the media is stronger than the capacity of the media to control the government, when the interests of the hidden media owners do not coincide with the interests of citizens, when the interests of individuals are realized at the expense of the public interest, which is supposed to protect the state, then the relativization of the problem of corruption in Society.*

**Keywords:** media owners, corruption in the media, public interest

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It can be concluded that strong political pressure is exerted on the media in Serbia, because under the pressure of political circles, the media silence events, or report them selectively and incompletely.

Since the freedom of the media in Serbia is in doubt, and since without free media there is no fight against corruption, in the period from January 2008 to June 2010, from the 50 large budget users in Serbia, the Anti-Corruption Council requested documentation of all forms Cooperation with the media, public relations agencies, marketing agencies, production companies and other media entities, in order to determine the ways in which the government exercises influence on the media. The analysis included all the ministries of the Government of Serbia, certain republican public enterprises and municipal utility companies, public agencies and other state bodies. The Council also analyzed the ownership structure of the largest media in Serbia. This media problem has been left without major changes for years because they do not offer any solutions that would lead the media out of the principle of market business, which only increases the rivalry among the media as well as their dependence on the advertisers.

Basic characteristics of media work have become insecurity in terms of employment, low wages, lack of social and health care, loss of social reputation, credibility and self-

1 M.Sc. of analysis of environmental protection, University of Novi Sad, Technical faculty "Mihajlo Pupin", Zrenjanin, Serbia, sssanja89@gmail.com

2 University Singidunum, Faculty of applied ecology "Futura", Belgrade, Serbia, rakic89@gmail.com

3 University "Union – Nikola Tesla", Beograd, "Faculty of management", Sremski Karlovci, Serbia, famzr.edu@gmail.com

-esteem. According to a study by the Center for Media and Media Research of the Faculty of Political Science in 2011: 60% of journalists are afraid of losing their jobs, while at the same time the percentage of part-time journalists is growing (16.15%); More than 12% of journalists work more than 50 hours a week; 35% of journalists earn up to 30,000 dinars a month, while a quarter of respondents do not receive salary on a regular basis; 16.5% of journalists have no general or no regular social contributions paid by the employer [1].

Because of this, the transfer of information about the work of state institutions has, over the past years, turned into banal marketing of promotional information about the work of officials who run state institutions, according to the system that has paid more, it gets more space. When, besides this, the media also offers and videos of video and video services whose monitoring and recording services are paid by ministries and other state institutions, and not by the media, then they no longer have to send journalistic teams to the field. They are provided with everything they need and what is desirable to publish. This is precisely why television and radio attachments, texts in newspapers, most often deprived of any research and analysis, although the Law on Public Information says that no one should restrict the freedom of public information in any way, and in particular the abuse of state or private powers. However, many budgets of state institutions serve precisely for the promotion of officials, ministers, directors, and therefore of their respective parties.

## **2. OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE**

Although media laws in Serbia speak of the need to establish pluralism of the media and to prevent illegal media concentration, citizens do not have full information about media owners in Serbia. Insufficient information about the Law on Broadcasting and media dealing with this topic draws the attention of the public from this segment, which states that a national legal entity in which the founders of foreign legal entities are registered in the countries in which, according to the request for obtaining a broadcasting license, can not participate the internal regulations of those countries, it is not allowed or it is not possible to determine the origin of the founding capital. Despite the legal provisions, there are a large number of media in Serbia, whose owners originate from such countries. The biggest problem with the media in the ownership structure of the company is the inability to determine the owner, which is contrary to the Broadcasting Law, which is valid for electronic media and the Law on Public Information. The owner is sometimes a physical person in Serbia, and sometimes the owner of a Cyprus firm is hiding in a network of other companies established around the world. In addition, if a registered offshore company is in one of the tax hierarchies, it is almost impossible for anyone to find out the identity of the ultimate owner, because instead of his name, he may eventually find out the name of the law firm that represents the company. That is why it is very difficult to track such traces and determine which interests are blamed over such media. In addition to this, real owners often hide behind domestic companies, which are mostly businessmen or politicians.

The Anti-Corruption Council has established in the 2011 Press and Media Control Press Report in Serbia that among the 30 most important media outlets in Serbia (12 daily newspapers, 7 weekly newspapers, 6 TV stations and 5 radio stations), even 18 media are owners Are not known to the local public [2]. The reason for this is, first of all, the presen-

ce of offshore companies in the ownership structures of the media, all of which, primarily, is aimed at hiding real owners and hiding the interests of those media from the public.

Table 1. *An Overview of Media Ownership Analysis in the Republic of Serbia (2011-2014)*; Source: *antikorupcija-savet.gov.rs* [3]

OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIA OWNERSHIP ANALYSIS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA (2011-2014)						
	Categories ownership	TV	Daily newspaper	Weekly newspaper	Radio stations	Internet portals
1.	Transparent	4	3	7	4	5
	<b>Total</b>	23				
2.	Non-transparent or partially transparent	6	5	1	1	1
	<b>Total</b>	14				
3.	Transparently with the perception of the public that the other person is the real owner	6	2	2	/	3
	<b>Total</b>	13				
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF ANALYZED MEDIA (1+2+3)</b>		<b>50</b>				

State institutions in Serbia allocate large budget funds to advertising, thus achieving personal and party promotion, which is at annual level, on a sample of 50 large budget users, of which the Anti-Corruption Council collected data, is not less than 15 million euros. In addition to this amount, the media through public competitions receive, depending on the source, an additional 21 to 25 million euros. However, there is no complete data on this, but if compared to the total advertising market of about 160 million euros, data are available that media out of state institutions comes to approximately one quarter of their revenues. Particularly in the financing of the media and their holding of economic dependence and uncertainty, there are public relations agencies, marketing and production agencies, mostly owned by party activists, or their affiliated persons. These agencies, between, have been controlling the advertising market for years. They buy from the media advertising space, which then sell it to customers at far higher prices. Agencies are coming to these jobs by allowing the media to advertise their advertising space at a lower price than under market conditions under unfavorable financial conditions. However, according to the information the Council came to investigating this phenomenon, it often happens that media agencies only spend part of the contracted amount in advance, and that the payment of the remaining parts is used for pressures on the media, ie they stop paying if the media starts dealing with a topic which is not in the interest of the party to which the owner of the agency belongs, or in his personal interest.

On many occasions, perhaps, the reasons and consequences of concealing property in the media may be most likely to be explained, with the help of state institutions, reflecting the editorial policy of the media. Thus, for years, analytical texts can not be found that cri-

ticize or problematize the business of certain individuals, their firms, and affiliates, even in cases where it is impossible to dispel some of the illegalities. The owners of large capital are always represented in such media as “patriotic businessmen”, “people of trust”, “successful domestic businessmen”, “intelligent business people”, promoted through cover pages, while “enemies” go quite differently and are followed by different headlines. There is no media war, where owners misuse media interest earnings, tracked attacks and counter-attacks using national frequencies that represent public good.

#### **4. PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS – STATE CARE?**

The number of attacks on journalists in Serbia in previous years has increased, and the response of institutions which should enable to improve the situation is not appropriate. The report published by the independent Association of Serbia (NUNS) [4], it is stated that from 2013 to June 2016 was 33 to press natural regeneration, regeneration 9 to property, verbal threats 69, pressure 32, and 2014 Reported 275 different attacks and threats on newspaper portals and their journalists and editors, and there are no data on media attacks on media organizations. It is stated that according to the available NUNS data, four journalists are under constant police protection, and that the biggest problem in these cases is that the state body does not provide adequate resources to investigate the threats and violence against journalists and does not primarily take measures to eliminate the threats.

The position of journalists is not favorable to censorship and economic position. 41.44% of journalists in the survey stated that the censorship affected their work, while 38.74% to almost not affected, and 18.2% that it is not at all affected. It was also stated that the number of working hours of journalists increased, and that their reduced wages, and research has shown that the salaries generally range between 300 and 400 euros.

Unions do not function properly because their authority and influence are limited, a small number of journalists are joining, and none of the unions offers the means for greater protection of journalists, especially in terms of work-related assistance. It is reported that a small number of journalists are joining associations that advocate for consistent law enforcement throughout the country and are under pressure.

The Press Council has been highlighted as a prime example of organization that has made progress in work, but the problem is that the media receiving public announcements do not publish it as it is prescribed or does not do so or does not interfere with the readers' eyes.

Regarding the regulations, the biggest problem is that they are not being applied, and the general conclusion of the report is that the state of the media has deteriorated since the adoption of new media laws 2014, attributable to the government's influence on the media and the resulting lack of editorial independence.

#### **5. DISCUSSION**

Because of all of this, the media in Serbia have lost their primary and important role in informing citizens about things important to their lives, as well as the role the media have in raising awareness of a problem. Media today their owners and politicians use it solely as a means of creating public opinion in order to achieve the more favorable rating and electoral results of political parties, but also personal gains of individuals. Therefore, in most

media there is no critical approach to the work of state organs, so it has become impossible to publish research journalistic texts and contributions in the media, except in rare cases when it suits some party or business elite.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The paper aims to present the existence of problems within the framework of corruption and the media, pointing to the existence of their linkages and developing critical awareness of the wider public mass. It also aims to point out particular concerns about independent, professional and research journalism, increase the number of attacks on journalists and stimulate further research on this topic because “there are no free media without free journalists”. Free journalists are those who are working and legally protected. In private media, workers can not choose their contracts and it is clear that they will accept in such a difficult existential situation that they do whatever they are offered to them. If they do not have a work contract, and there are so many today, they can do whatever they want to manipulate, which does not represent the freedom of the media.

## 7. LITERATURE

1. <http://www.bilten.org/?p=2308>
2. <http://www.antikorupcijasavet.gov.rs/Storage/Global/Documents/mediji/IZVESTAJ%20O%20MEDIJIMA,%20PRECISCENA%20VERZIJA.pdf>
3. <http://www.antikorupcija-savet.gov.rs/Storage/Global/Documents/izvestaji/izvestaj%20mediji%2026%2002.pdf>
4. <http://www.euractiv.rs/mediji/10857-pogorano-stanje-medija-u-srbiji>
5. <http://www.nuns.rs/codex/Mediji-u-demokratiji/Zastita-bezbednosti-novinara.html>