



ФАКУЛТЕТ ЗА ТУРИЗАМ И УГОСТИТЕЛСТВО
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Subject:

"Networking of media from the border region of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania for economic and cultural development"

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Introduction

The media, as a powerful tool for the distribution of information, are an appropriate choice for achieving the cultural, economic and social improvement of the environment in which they operate. For a long time, the media are not just intermediaries that transmit some content, but in fact they create social developments by highlighting or concealing events and changes. The emergence of each new media causes new expectations, uncertainty but also fears due to the creation of critical thought and support for the actions of the critical mass in society. Access to information becomes simple, without time and space barriers and with the possibility of mass information in a short period of time. In order to understand the world we live in today, it is impossible not to be involved in the media. Everyday functioning is the basis of their application and they are both objects and subjects at the same time. It is well known that the media are not only transmitters, but important, if not key, creators of messages. The media has an essential role in creating and shaping public opinion. Their role in democratization is of special importance, to the extent that they are free and critical, they also contribute to the overall democratic atmosphere and responsibility in society. For all these reasons, regular media research and analysis are of key importance for the Western Balkans, which with its transitional structures and hopes for the advancement of state institutions, procedures and rules, are still very weak and exposed to various influences, mostly political and financial.

In this research paper, we are talking about the media, which are of great importance for the cultural, economic and social advancement of the cross-border cooperation, between the Southwest region in the Republic of North Macedonia and the region of Korca, in the Republic of Albania. Cross-border cooperation between these two regions in terms of media, which are partially used for cooperation, can contribute to the expansion of opportunities for cooperation, a better understanding of cultural differences and similarities.

The research was conducted through a survey questionnaire, on a sample of 200 citizens, of which 100 from the Macedonian and 100 from the Albanian border region.

Also, 2 focus groups (Macedonian-Albanian) were conducted, the purpose of which was to obtain information about the needs of the residents in both regions and how they can fulfill them with the help of the media.

A panel discussion was also held with media stakeholders on the challenges they face in their work and the creation of a joint program for cooperation to achieve the set goals.

Research was conducted in order to find out how much media is used to inform the population in these border regions, which media they use most often, which program they follow most often, if they learn about the neighboring country from the programs they follow, and how all this can be advances for the development of the border region between the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania.

Analysis of the current situation through the implementation of quantitative and qualitative research methods

The analysis of the current situation with representation, functionality and the need for media cooperation and networking in the border region of the Southwestern part of RSM and the Republic of Albania was carried out through qualitative and quantitative research.

The southwestern part of RSM extends to 3340 km², that is, occupies 13% of the total territory of the state, and the region of Korča extends to 3711 km², occupying 12.9% of the total territory of the state. The Southwestern region includes 13 municipalities of Debar, Centar Župa, Kichevo, Vraneshtica, Zajas, Oslomej, Makedonski Brod, Plasnica, Ohrid, Debarca, Struga and Vevcani, while the Korca region includes the districts of Korca, Podgradec, Devol and Kolonja. Korča is located in southeastern Albania, near the border with the Republic of Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia, at the foot of the Morava mountain, at an altitude of about 850 meters. It has a convenient geographical position and is located on trade routes that connect the Republic of Albania with the Republic of North Macedonia (47 kilometers) and with the Republic of Greece (35 kilometers).



Map of the border region of RSM and RA

The population in the border region of the Southwestern part of RSM and the part of Korcha in RA is demographically characterized as an old population on both sides of the region. The migration of the young able-bodied population due to existential reasons and quality of life has been observed massively. The total population in the border region of the two countries is less than 400,000 inhabitants and is characterized by an increase below the national rate leading to a decrease in population density. Regarding the telecommunication network coverage, which also plays a major role in the digitization of the region, the following situation can be observed:

- All cities and most villages in the Republic of North Macedonia are connected to the national and international communication network, but the percentage of subscribers is much higher in the southern part (36 subscribers per 100 inhabitants in Ohrid) than in the northern part (8 subscribers per 100 inhabitants in Tetovo);
- In the Republic of Albania, the total number of subscriber units for fixed and mobile phones (families and other users) is 16,025 users, which represents only 7% of all

Albania. The defects of the fixed line system and its low coverage (only 23% of households) have been replaced by the use of mobile communications.

- Precise information on Internet access in the cross-border region is not available, but it is lower than the national average (in 2004, 78 people per 1,000 in the Republic of Macedonia and 24 people per 1,000 in Albania) and is insufficient. This is due to frequent system failures fixed lines and its low coverage in Rs. Albania, due to high prices and insufficiently educated staff in both countries.

A large part of the population receives information about the happenings in the environment and outside it through televisions and radios. The availability of television and radio media in rural areas is a unique opportunity for information. The media at the local level carry out the dissemination of the national cultural treasures from their region and the neighboring country, mutual promotion of the tourist attractions, as well as the daily political events of the border region and in their country. In the border region of the Republic of Albania, the situation with editing of radio and television programs has improved compared to 10 years ago, but the frequent restriction of electricity and problems with transmitters are still present today.

In a large part of mountainous settlements, internet communication is weak or non-existent due to the network coverage of the operators in our country. Internet communication is less used due to the age limit, economic reasons, lack of education for Internet communication, as well as problems with network coverage.

Research

The media, as a powerful tool for the distribution of information, is an appropriate choice for achieving the cultural, economic and social advancement of the border region. To what extent the population is able to use this tool for the development of their own region, will be investigated in the South-West region of the Republic of North Macedonia and the region of Korca, in the Republic of Albania. The research will be carried out by conducting a survey questionnaire on a representative sample of 100 citizens from the Macedonian (Debar and Ohrid) and 100 citizens from the Albanian (Korcha and Devol)

border region, from which relevant data will be obtained on the use of media for information (which media are used most often, which program they most often follow, whether the programs have a repertoire from which they can get information about the neighboring country, etc.).

A panel discussion with media stakeholders about the challenges they face in their work and the creation of a joint program for cooperation to achieve the set goals will be held in Korča, as well as focus groups (Macedonian-Albanian) to obtain information about the needs of the covered areas and how in terms of media, the same can be satisfied in Ohrid and Podgradec.

Activities undertaken during the research were:

- Survey of the number of existing media in the Southwestern region of RSM and the region of Korca in the Republic of Albania;
- Conversation with citizens from RSM (border region) for information about tourist destinations in the border region of Korča in RA;
- Conversation with citizens from RA (border region) for information about tourist destinations in the Southwestern region of RSM;
- Research on establishing a media platform from the border region and mutual signing of memoranda of cooperation;
- Conversation with the RA media for analysis of the obtained results and preparation of an operational plan for activities.

The purpose of the research is cultural, economic and social advancement through the media represented in the South-West region in RSM and the region of Korca in the Republic of Albania. In order to achieve the goal, several methods were applied during the research, such as survey questionnaire, focus group, panel discussion, analysis, comparison, with the help of which the goal was achieved.

Research results

Survey of the number of existing media in the Southwestern region of RSM and the region of Korca in the Republic of Albania

According to the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the following companies broadcast programs on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia: Public Broadcasting Company Macedonian Radio Television Skopje, Commercial Broadcasting Company ALFA TV DOOEL Skopje, Commercial Broadcasting Company ALSAT-M DOO Skopje, Commercial Broadcasting Company KANAL 5 DOOEL Skopje, Commercial Broadcasting Company Television SITEL DOOEL Skopje, Commercial Broadcasting Company TELEVIZIA MAKPETROL DOOEL Skopje, Commercial broadcasting company KOMPANI 21-M DOOEL Skopje, Commercial broadcasting company TV SHENJA DOOEL Skopje, Commercial broadcasting company KLAN MACEDONIA DOOEL Export Import Tetovo, Commercial broadcasting company TELEVIZIA SONCE DOOEL Prilep, Commercial broadcasting company 24 Vesti DOOEL Shtip, Broadcasting company NASA TV DOOEL Skopje.¹

At the regional level (southwest region), in addition to the above-mentioned media, the following companies operate: Commercial Broadcasting Company TV M Arnaudov Mihajlo Ohrid DOOEL (edits its own program in the territory of Ohrid, Struga, Vevcani, Debarca), Commercial Broadcasting Company TELEVIZIA 3 DOOEL Skopje (edits own program on the territory of Debar, Center Zhupa). The following companies meet at the local level: Trade broadcasting company Jovan Trpeski TV Moris LLC Ohrid (Ohrid and Debarca), Trade broadcasting company TV Kaltrina Mazar Tateshi, Struga LLC (Struga and Vevcani), Trade company for broadcasting activity SPEKTRA, Municipality of Labunishta LLC (Struga and Vevcani), Commercial Broadcasting Company DIBRA TV LLC Debar (Debar, Centar Župa), Commercial Broadcasting Company TV GURRA LLC Kichevo (Kicevo, Plasnica, Makedonski Brod), Commercial Broadcasting Company TV ANISA LLC village of Plasnica – Plasnica (Plasnica, Kichevo) , Makedonski Brod), Trade

¹ <https://avmu.mk/registar-na-televizii/>

broadcasting company Television USKANA MEDIA DOOEL Kicevo (Kicevo, Plasnica, Makedonski Brod) .²

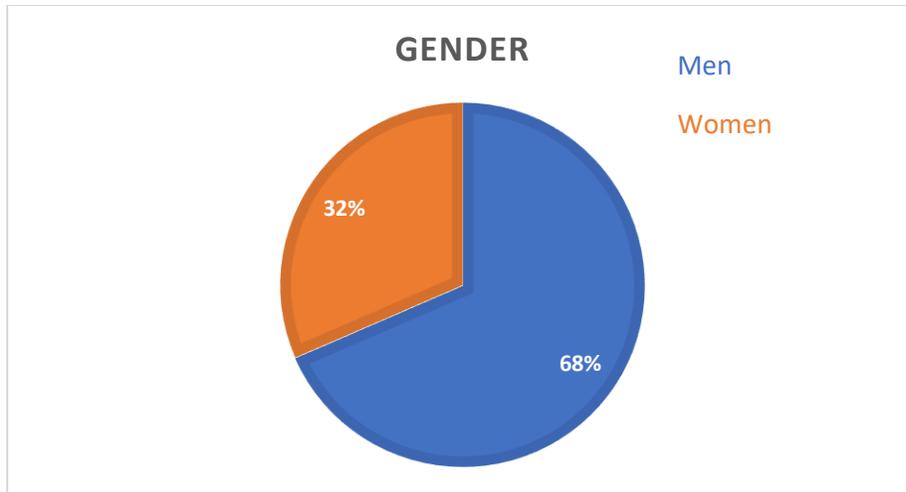
On the territory of the Republic of Albania, the following public channels are broadcast at the national level: RTSH 1 HD, RTSH 2 HD, RTSH 3 HD, RTSH Plus, RTSH Sport HD, RTSH Muzike, RTSH Film, RTSH 24, RTSH Shqip, RTSH Kuvend, TVSH , TVSH, TVSH 2. National private channels are the following: Top Channel, TV Klan, Vizion Plus. Of the three public networks, one is broadcast via satellite to Albanian-speaking communities in neighboring countries. Radio Televizioni Korça is a local version of RTSH that covers Korça and its surroundings, and the local television Televizioni Sot7 is broadcast in Podgradec.

1.2 Relevant data on the use of media for information (which media are most often used, which program they most often follow, whether the programs have a repertoire from which they are informed about the neighboring country, etc.) from the implementation of a survey questionnaire on a representative sample of 100 citizens from the Macedonian and 100 citizens from the Albanian border region.

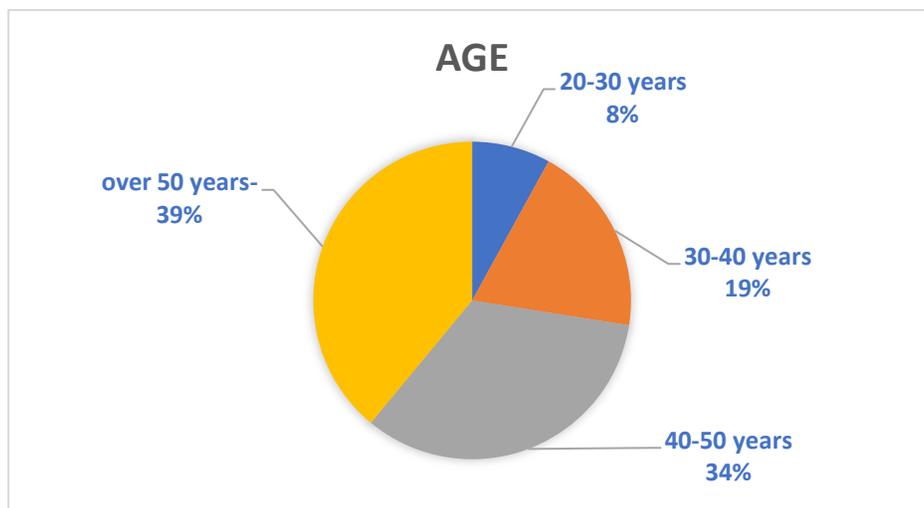
The research was conducted through a survey questionnaire, on a sample of 200 citizens, of which 100 from the Macedonian region (Ohrid, Debar), and 100 from the Albanian border region (Korcha and Devol). In addition to questions about gender and age of respondents, the survey questionnaire contained 5 additional questions. An analysis of their answers follows.

Out of a total of 200 respondents (on both sides), 137 were men and 63 were women.

² <https://avmu.mk/registar-na-televizii/>



In terms of age, out of a total of 200 respondents, 16 were aged 20-30, 39 aged 30-40, 67 aged 40-50, and 78 were aged over 50.

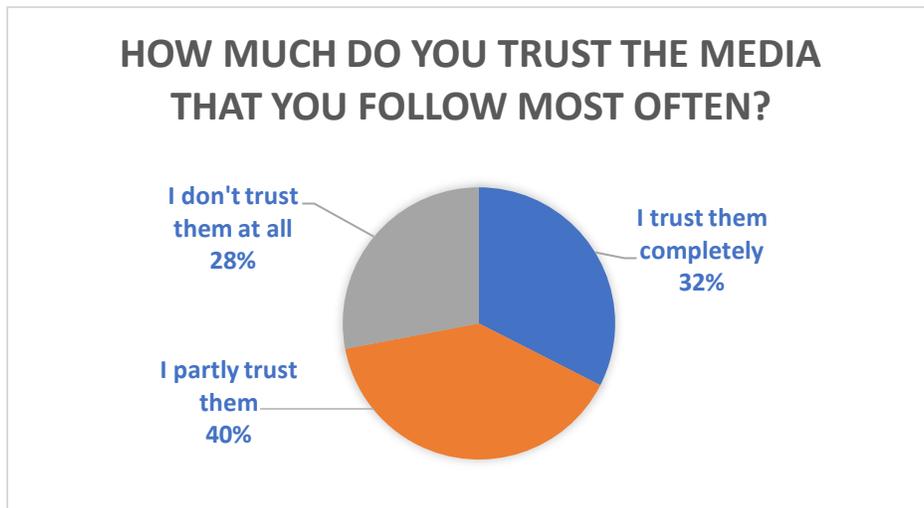


How much do you trust the media that you follow most often? Do you believe them?

To this question, respondents had the opportunity to choose one of the three offered answers.

- I trust them completely;
- I partially believe them;
- I don't trust them at all.

Out of a total of 200 respondents, 65 answered that they fully trust them, 79 partially trust them, and the remaining 56 do not trust them at all.

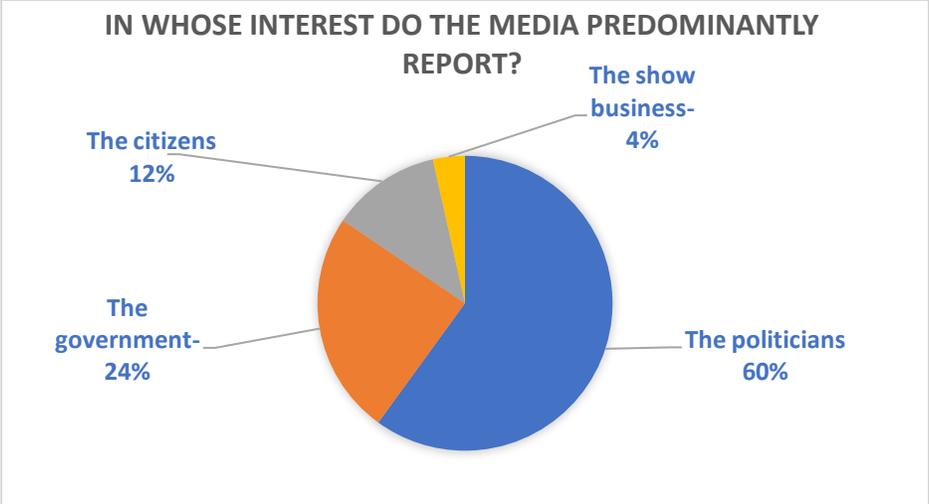


predominantly report?

On this question, respondents again have a choice between four offered answers.

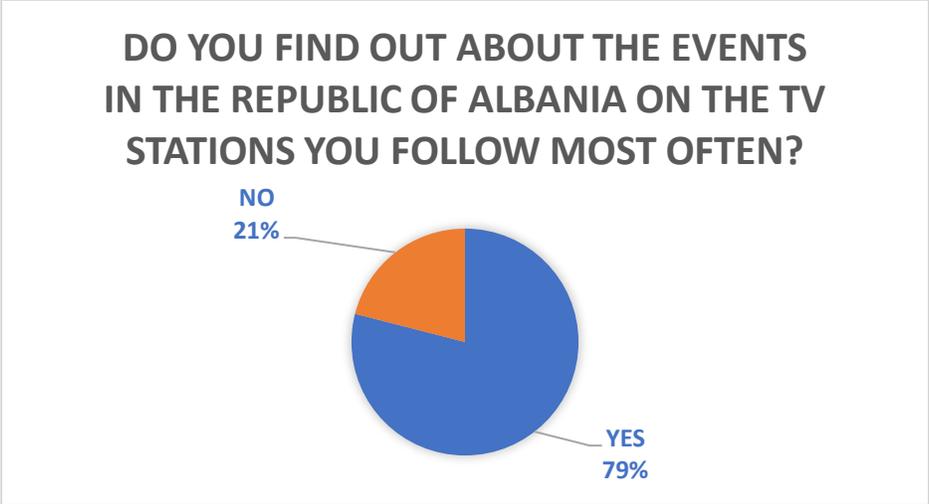
- To the citizens;
- To the government;
- Politicians in general;
- Estrada.

Out of a total of 200 respondents, 120 answered that the media mostly report in the interest of politicians in general, 49 about the government, only 24 answered that televisions report in the interest of citizens, and 7 declared that the media mostly report on events from show business.

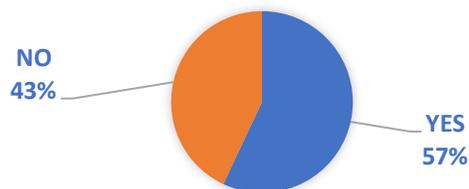


Do you find out about the events in the neighboring country (Macedonia/Albania) on the TV stations you follow most often?

Out of 100 respondents from the Macedonian side, 79 answered yes, and the remaining 21 answered no. While, out of 100 respondents on the Albanian side, 57 answered yes, and 43 answered no.



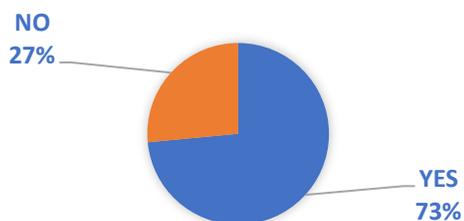
**DO YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE EVENTS
IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA
ON THE TV STATIONS YOU FOLLOW
MOST OFTEN?**



Do you use the Internet as a means of obtaining information about your country and neighboring countries?

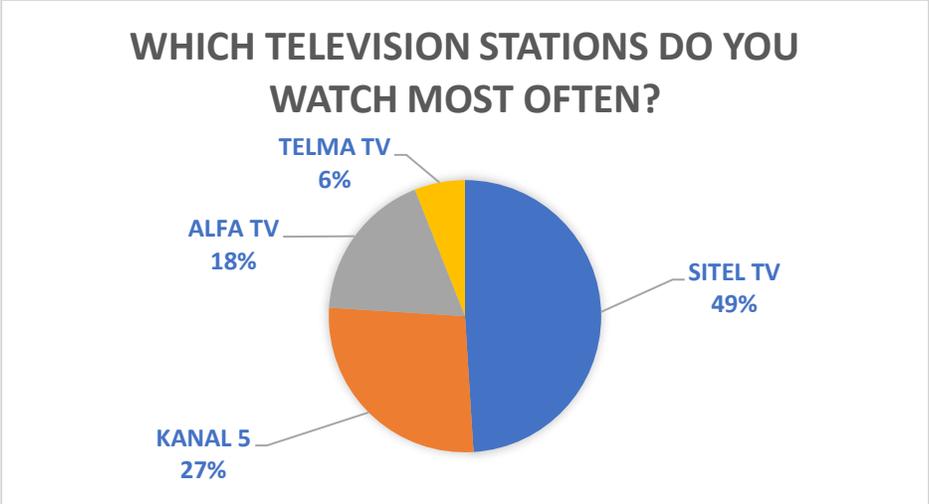
147 respondents answered yes to this question, and 53 answered no.

**DO YOU USE THE INTERNET AS A MEANS
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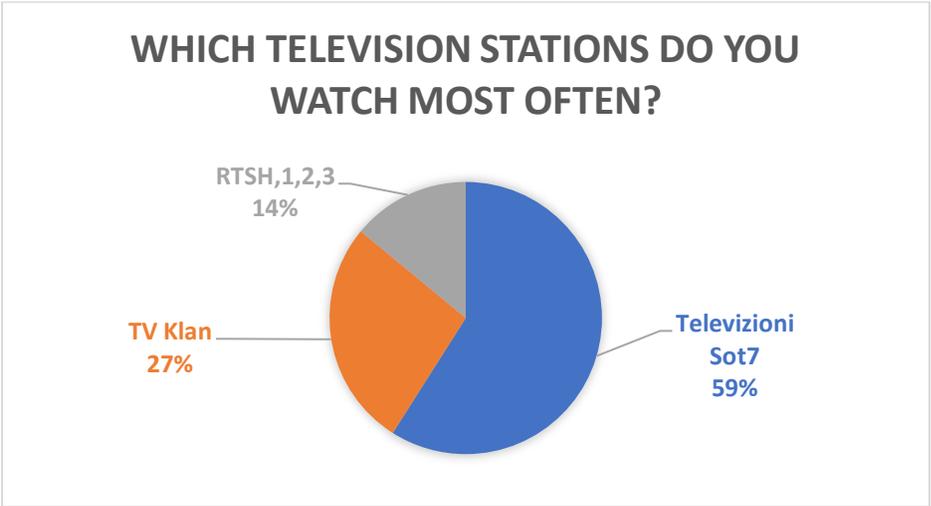


Which television stations do you watch most often? List three at least (if any).

On the Macedonian side, the most frequently mentioned televisions were Sitel, Kanal 5, Alfa TV and Thelma. Sitel was listed in first place by 49 respondents, Kanal 5 by 27, Alfa by 18 respondents, and Thelma by 6 respondents. TV M, TV Shenya and TV Morris were mentioned in a small but insignificant number.



On the Albanian side, the respondents mostly mentioned RTSH1,2 and 3, TV Klan I n. Out of 100 respondents, Televizioni Sot7 was ranked first in viewership, 59 respondents, TV Klan 27, and the remaining 14 named the three national televisions RTSH1,2 and 3.



From the analysis of these questions, it can be concluded that the population in the two border regions believes that the media pay more attention to public life, that is, to politicians, and that they do not pay enough attention to the well-being of the citizens. Most of the respondents do not use the Internet to obtain current information, that is, they do not use the Internet at all, and they are partially aware of the events in the neighboring country through the television stations they follow.

1.3 Also, 2 focus groups (Macedonian-Albanian) were conducted, the purpose of which was to obtain information about the needs of residents in both regions and how they can fulfill them with the help of the media.

Within the framework of the research, two focus groups were also conducted. Each focus group contained 10 residents from the border areas (of which 5 are Macedonian and Albanian representatives), so a total of 20. The focus groups discussed the role of the media in their daily lives, work, maintaining good neighborly relations. Those present declared that in addition to the national television channels, they occasionally watch television programs from their border neighbor, but not enough, that is, they are not sufficiently familiar with the happenings in the neighborhood. Those present declared that in addition to the national television channels, they occasionally watch television programs from their border neighbor, but not enough, that is, they are not sufficiently familiar with the happenings in the neighborhood. They would rather have television programs that share information about both countries, about the beauty that both countries have, about music, as well as about tradition, which is the greatest wealth. Only 5 of those present said that they use the Internet for searching, that they occasionally read information about the neighboring country, but that is not enough.

1.4 A panel discussion was also held with media stakeholders about the challenges they face in their work and the creation of a joint program for cooperation to achieve the set goals.

Two representatives from 6 local television stations from both countries were present at the panel discussion. It was discussed about the situation in which the local televisions are, about the problems and challenges they are facing. They emphasized that according to their possibilities, they share information about important developments from the neighboring country, but not often, due to many factors, the most significant of which is the lack of finances. They agreed that they would like to make a joint program, which will broadcast musical events, culinary activities, shows about the tradition and folklore of both countries, and of course, in one part of the program, the current political events in both countries would be announced.

1.5 Conversation with citizens from RSM (border region) for information about tourist destinations in the border region of Korča in RA

During the research, conversations were held with residents from urban and rural areas who make a living from tourism. In the conversation, they pointed out that the state does not subsidize or invest in the development of tourism. They have financial losses due to the pandemic, the energy and economic crisis, and the state does not provide support in subsidies in any sphere. It would be helpful to re-implement vouchers, investment in energy-efficient cooling-heating systems for tourist facilities or households that are registered and pay tax to the state from renting out facilities. Regarding the promotion of the tourist destinations, all the participants said that they do the promotion themselves, a plan by the local government to promote the tourist destinations.

(Statement of a 52-year-old man, owner of a tourist facility in Struga)

1.6 Conversation with citizens from RA (border region) for information about tourist destinations in the Southwestern region of RSM

During the research visit to Korča and Devol, conversations about tourist life were held with residents of these areas. In one of the conversations, the residents of Devol pointed out that very little is being invested in the promotion of tourism in Devol. That most of the investments are made by returnees from Western European countries. In the winter period, it can be said that tourism is at a standstill. Due to improper use of the water capacity of the lake, it often happens that the water level is reduced and this does not help in attracting tourists. In the last 2 years, a large part of the people involved in tourism migrated and stopped operating their tourism facilities. Regarding whether they have information about tourist offers from RSM and how they find out, most of them know from advertisements on internet portals, almost none from television.

(Statement of a 43-year-old man, Devol, Republic of Albania)

Analysis of similar events

Within the framework of the Cross-Border Cooperation Program, a similar event was held in the past, but I believe that the goal was not achieved for the following reasons:

Event: 21.10 2021 Korca, Republic of Albania

EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION DAY

Under the slogan "Past, Tradition, Future – The way we interact!" on 21.10.2021 in Korča, Albania, an event was held to mark the European Day for Territorial Cooperation.³



"Past, tradition, future - The way we communicate" is the slogan of the upcoming cross-border event, the seventh consecutive celebration of the European Day for Territorial Cooperation that will be held today in Korça, organized by the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, in cooperation with the Ministry of Local Self-Government of North Macedonia. The main goal of this event is the benefits of the implementation of the IPA program for cross-border cooperation between the two countries financed by the European Union

As the MIA reporter reported, the main focus of this event is identifying opportunities for tourism development, promoting cooperation in the cross-border area between North

³ <https://fpep-cbc.mk/mk/>

Macedonia and Albania, as well as promoting the results of projects that are part of the EU cross-border program.

From my point of view, I think that this event did not fully achieve its goal because:

- The event does not initiate specific collaborations between the participants, but only promotes them;
- The media as promoters are not fully covered;
- There is no constant team that works and promotes only this event;

The event should have a comprehensive analysis of the mutual needs of the participants, a way of entering into cooperation which, as a first step, will be taken exactly at this event, through the exchange of portfolios, the conclusion of agreements/memorandums for cooperation, twinning and similar forms of entering into cooperation.

Conclusion

The role of the media in globalization is crucial, because they prepare the ground for the action of multinational corporations, and at the same time promote global values, including democratic ones.

Media have an important role in attracting the attention of the public and the relevant institutions.

The survival and development of regional and local media is an extremely important factor for the democratization and Europeanization of society, considering that modern Europe is based on the development of the region and decentralization, that is, bringing the government closer to the citizens. Although there is cross-border cooperation between the regional media in the area of Korcha and the southwestern part of Macedonia, it is still not at a satisfactory level and needs to be improved. Considering the fact that we live in a time of strong technological progress, the cooperation of the media in the region receives new opportunities and platforms for its realization almost every day. Strengthening the cooperation of the media in the region can contribute to a greater

degree of cooperation and understanding between politics, the economy and citizens in both regions, thus promoting its stability and development. All this was shown through the analysis of the survey questionnaires carried out among the population, as well as through the focus groups and the panel discussion, therefore it is proposed to establish a common program, through which it will be possible to strengthen the cross-border cooperation of the regions, with the help of the media.

All this was shown through the analysis of the survey questionnaires carried out among the population, as well as through the focus groups and the panel discussion, therefore it is proposed to establish a common program, through which it will be possible to strengthen the cross-border cooperation of the regions, with the help of the media.

My recommendation is to organize an event, similar to the Cultural Summer, which will be traditional every year on a day that will be jointly determined by the organizers from the two regions. At the event, each local government, NGO, associations, companies (corporate sector), city / village will have its own presentation of what it does, how it contributes and what service / employment it can offer to its neighbor. The event would have a duration of 2 days, which will be preceded by media coverage from the already networked media from both countries in order to increase attendance. The idea is to have representatives from the local self-government, NGOs, civil associations, private business owners who will solemnly sign memoranda of cooperation and conclude mutual cooperation agreements. This entire event will be covered by the media, which will be broadcast on the most watched TV and radio stations in the entire border region. I believe that with such an event, not only the cultural side would be covered (like the European Day of Cooperation events in 2015 and 2016), but economic cooperation would also develop. An opportunity to overcome the challenges facing the border region. The media working in rural areas with network operations will ensure the enrichment of their program and viewership. The exchange of reports, challenges and advantages will contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the population in that region. An opportunity to overcome the challenges facing the border region. The media working in rural areas with network operations will ensure the enrichment of their program and viewership. The exchange of reports, challenges and advantages will contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the population in that region. This event also

satisfies the need for personnel exchange and mutual improvement with trainings and exchange of experiences, advertisements for job positions and opportunities for cooperation and investment. Media is a tool that is used by everyone and it reaches different target groups. Increased awareness contributes to the equality and competitiveness of the market, the development of mutual functioning and the advancement of society. Professional promotion of tourist facilities by the media helps in the development of tourism. Publicly available information about certain developments and needs is an opportunity for the exchange of experiences, improvement of functioning, provision of adequate personnel or training of personnel by exchange of capacities between the two countries. Media sharing of functioning, cultural events and overall life of people in the border region can lead to improvement of quality of life, reduction of migration and cultural upgrading. For all of this to have sustainability and progress in functioning, staff is needed, i.e. employment of young people who will be the bearers of this project. Who will work on active communication between the media and their visibility. The promotion of this way of media work is in the interest of every stakeholder in society. The viewership of the local media will contribute to the increase of the advertising space of the local corporate facilities, and thus the media and the corporate sector will benefit. The media network operation in the direction of mutual promotion also enables the provision of funds that are intended for developing countries. The media with proper information will contribute to unifying the capacities of the NGO sector, local self-governments and other stakeholders for applying projects that will improve the border region. The network coordinated operation of the media from the border region can also serve in prevention and early reporting in conditions of accidents and disasters, for mutual protection of the population and strengthening of the capacities of the population for their protection. The content of the preventive program can be in cooperation with state institutions (CMC, SSO, Ministry of the Interior, etc.) or with the NGO sector. All this will contribute to the general safety as well as the safety of the tourist facilities. In essence, the media is a powerful tool that can be used for every segment of social life and its advancement.

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