

Baseline Assessment of Macedonian Media



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Skopje 2014

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BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF MACEDONIAN MEDIA



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Transparency International – Macedonia (<http://www.transparency.mk/>)

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MEMO 98 (<http://www.memo98.sk/>)

For Transparency International Macedonia

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“The mass communications media provide information to most voters that is essential to the choice they exercise at the ballot box. Therefore, proper media conduct toward all political parties and candidates, as well as proper media conduct in the presentation of information that is relevant to electoral choices, are crucial to achieving democratic elections. Monitoring media conduct – when done impartially, proficiently and based on a credible methodology – establishes whether this key aspect of an election process contributes to or subverts the democratic nature of elections. Media monitoring can measure the amount of coverage of electoral subjects, the presence of news bias, appropriateness of media access for political competitors and the adequacy of information conveyed to voters through news, direct political messages, public information programming and voter education announcements. Shortcomings in media conduct can be identified through monitoring in time for corrective action. Abuse of the mass media power to affect voter choices also can be documented, which allows the population and the international community to appropriately characterize the true nature of the electoral process.”

Robert Norris and Patrick Merloe



1. Executive Summary

1. Public and private broadcasters aired a number of election-related programs, thus providing candidates with a platform to present their opinions and enabling voters to compare contestants.
2. Overall, the media did not provide fully informed, analysed and assessed views of the contestants in their news programmes, making it more difficult for voters to make a fully informed choice.
3. The overall dominance of the ruling party in the media coverage of the campaign – both in their official capacities and as candidates – meant that contestants were not afforded equal access.
4. The campaign was characterized by an overall lack of debate among contestants on important issues of public policy, and by a general lack of vibrant political discourse facilitated by media.
5. Print media provided a wide range of views, often showing bias in favour or against particular political options. In general, the print media failed to provide deeper analytical and investigative reporting.

2. Project Overview

Transparency International Macedonia (TIM)¹, an independent, non-profit organization that promotes the values of freedom and democracy, was systematically monitoring the media coverage of the April presidential and early parliamentary elections.² This monitoring was a part of the project funded by the European Union, under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, conducted in cooperation with a UK-based Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) and a Slovak media-monitoring organization MEMO 98,³

The monitoring was intended to offer professional, comprehensive, and objective assessment of political diversity, accuracy, and balance in news and current affairs coverage on seven television channels, two radio stations, four newspapers, and one online media outlet. The methodology was developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar projects in some 47 countries in the last 15 years.⁴ Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, the methodology was specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects and themes. The outcome of the monitoring is not just a set of data, but a detailed analysis and evaluation of the current level of political diversity in media reporting, examined in the proper context, and incorporating concrete comparisons and analysis.

The media monitoring included quantitative analysis of the coverage, which focussed on the amount of time allocated to each subject, as well as the tone of the coverage in which the relevant political subjects were portrayed: positive, neutral or negative. Qualitative analysis assessed the performance of the media against specific principles or benchmarks – such as ethical or professional standards – that cannot be easily quantified. Monitors reported on lies, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias, and anything else that was important to presenting the quality of reporting.

¹ Transparency International Macedonia is a fully accredited member of the Transparency international.

² The monitoring was carried out from 17 March until 13 April.

³ The project “Support to independent media in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Advocacy and training to promote adherence to international best practice” is funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The content of this report is the sole responsibility of the implementing partners and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

⁴ www.memo98.sk

This data was reported separately and integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

The overall goal of the project was to provide support to media through training, mentoring, and advocacy to promote their adherence to international best practice and good practice regarding freedom of expression and independence of media. The specific problems identified during the monitoring were focused on during the next phase of the project by providing targeted trainings to media representatives.

3. Monitoring Sample

Based on criteria such as media ownership, coverage, and impact, the following national media were included into the monitoring:

Table 1: Media monitored

Media	Ownership	Programmes monitored	Geographical outreach
<i>MRT-1</i>	Publicly-funded	Prime time news 19.30 h	Nationwide
<i>MRT-2</i>	Publicly-funded	Prime time news 18.30 h	Nationwide
<i>Sitel</i>	Private	Prime time news 19.00 h	Nationwide
<i>Kanal 5</i>	Private	Prime time news 17.55 h	Nationwide
<i>Alsot-M</i>	Private	Prime time news 20.00 h	Nationwide
<i>Telma</i>	Private	Prime time news 18.30 h	Nationwide
<i>Vesti 24</i>	Private	Prime time news 20.00 h	Nationwide
<i>MR-1</i>	Publicly-funded	Central News Programme 15.30 h	Nationwide
<i>Kanal 77</i>	Private	Central Main News 14.00 h and 17.00 h	Nationwide
<i>Dnevnik</i>	Private	Political and Election coverage	Nationwide
<i>Sloboden Pecat</i>	Private	Political and Election coverage	Nationwide
<i>Republika</i>	Private	Political and Election coverage	Nationwide
<i>Focus</i>	Private	Political and Election coverage	Nationwide

The monitoring team observed media coverage of the Macedonian political scene in order to:

- assess whether political entities were granted fair access to the media;
- supply the media, political entities, regulatory organs, citizens, and international community with data to measure the objectivity of the Macedonian media;
- raise public awareness and encourage journalists, editors and media outlet owners to observe standards of balanced reporting;
- motivate citizens to better understand the role of the media.

In addition, the project intended to:

- enhance the capacity of the civil and academic communities in conducting the advanced media researches;
- increase public pressure on journalists, editors and media owners to provide information that is more accurate, impartial and fair.

To achieve these objectives, TIM assessed the media coverage against Macedonian legislation and internationally recognized professional standards on the ethics of journalism, which include:

- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of information
- Accuracy and transparency
- Balance
- Impartiality

4. Methodology

The methodology for the media monitoring incorporates both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and is based on the methodology developed by 'MEMO 98' which has been used in 47 countries.

Quantitative analysis

The quantitative component of the monitoring consisted of a content analysis of a representative sample of media outlets. Media monitors measured the total amount of time devoted to selected subjects.

Monitored subjects:

- Government (all relevant government agencies and bodies)
- President
- Political parties (all parties registered for the elections)⁵
- Local government⁶

⁵ **VMRO-DPMNE Coalition:** VMRO - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity, Socialist Party of Macedonia, Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia, Union of Roma of Macedonia, Party of Justice, Party for Democratic Action of Macedonia, Party of the Vlachs in Macedonia, Party on Integration of Roma, Labour – Farmers Party of the Republic of Macedonia, Permanent Macedonian Radical Unity, New Liberal Party, Party of United Democrats of Macedonia, Motherland Macedonian Organization on Radical Renewal – Vardar, Aegean – Pirin, Macedonian Alliance, Democratic Part of the Turks in Macedonia, VMRO – DP (VMRO – Democratic Party), Democratic Union, Democratic Renewal of Macedonia, Democratic Forces of Roma, Democratic Party of Roma, Social – Democratic Union, Roma – United for Macedonia; **SDSM Coalition:** Social Democratic Union of Macedonia – SDUM, New Social Democratic Party (NSDP), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), United for Macedonia (UM), Party for Movement of the Turks in Macedonia (PMTM), Party for the Full Emancipation of Roma (PFER), Serbian Stranka in Macedonia (SSM) Democratic Union of Vlachs in Macedonia (DMVM), Sandzak Ligue (SL) ; **Citizens' option for Macedonia (GROM):** GROM, Liberal Party, Tito's Left Forces, Serb Progressive Party in Macedonia, Party of Free Democrats; **Dostoinstvo:** Dostoinstvo, Macedonian Uniting Reform Organization - Central Democratic Union (MORO-CDU), **Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), Democratic Union for Integrations (DUI), National Democratic Revival (NDR), Party for European Future (PEI), National Movement for Macedonia, Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – People's Party (VMRO NP), Social Democratic Party of Macedonia, Party for Economic Changes.**

⁶ Given the fact that five different parties and coalitions (VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DPA, DUI, GROM) controlled local government in various parts of the country,

In order to monitor the broadcast media, monitors used stopwatches to measure the actual “direct/indirect appearance time” of selected subjects. They also separately recorded each instance where a subject was mentioned indirectly (e.g. by a news presenter or by someone else) as a “reference”.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative measurements was subdivided into two major categories:

1. Monitors evaluated the tone in which the relevant subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. This data was recorded for all stories and presented graphically to illustrate differences between outlets and differences over time.
2. Important additional comments relating to a content-based analysis that illustrate balance, fairness, accuracy, timely, transparency, matter-of-fact or attempts at manipulation. These data offered more insights than simple positive and negative measurements. These trends were systematically documented to provide compelling evidence about media conduct.

It is the behaviour of media outlets that was being assessed, not the monitored subjects. Positive and negative ratings refer to whether or not the viewer/reader was offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. Monitors gave an evaluation mark to all subjects, in addition to time and reference, to provide information on how the subject was portrayed by each media outlet. The evaluation mark was thus attached to all monitored subjects to determine whether the subject was presented in a positive, negative, or neutral light.

The description of the five-level evaluation scale was as follows:

Grade 1 and 2 meant that a certain monitored subject was presented in a very positive or positive light respectively; in both instances the news coverage was favourable.

Grade 3 was a “neutral mark”, with the coverage being solely factual, without positive or negative connotations.

Grades 4 or 5 meant that a subject was presented in a negative or very negative light respectively. Such coverage had negative connotations, accusations or one-sided criticism of a subject portrayed in an item or story.

It was important for monitors to consider the actual evaluation (judgement) on the monitored subject and also the context of the story or item.

As for the qualitative (content-based) analysis, the monitors reported on fabrications, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias and anything else that was important to the presentation of quality of media reporting. The data was reported separately, but integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

In order to eliminate any elements of subjectivity in the qualitative analysis, the monitors’ analysis was subject to frequent quality checks. Where there was a difference of opinion over the evaluation of a particular item, the whole monitoring team (or a team leader) evaluated the item before making a final decision on its “tone.”

The monitors evaluated:

- the placement of relevant stories and items in comparison with other reported topics and issues;
- the overall quality of political diversity in media reporting;
- journalist’s knowledge and his/her ability to work with facts and information;
- the ability of the author to engage the audience;
- the overall impression of how the media outlet covers political stories;
- the journalist’s involvement in the story;
- whether interview questions were fair or “loaded;”

- how the language used shaped the audience's understanding and perception of politics;
- whether certain language, graphics and camera angles were used to influence the audience's perception of the monitored subjects and topics.

Data collection and analysis

For each day's news coverage a monitoring form was completed and entered into a database. The collected data consisted of subject/affiliation, time (direct, indirect and total), evaluation, item start, item end, topic, and time index. Given the relatively small number of data types, an Excel spreadsheet is sufficient for processing the monitoring results.

TIM's monitoring focused on primetime news, analyzing the coverage by the time allotted to each relevant monitored subject, the tone of the coverage, and assessing whether journalistic standards were being observed.

5. Monitoring Findings

Summary

The media outlets are divided along political lines, with the majority supporting the current establishment. Many outlets remain strongly influenced by their owners, and only a few succeed in pursuing a more independent editorial policy. In particular, it is alleged that the main media are under control of the ruling parties *inter alia* thanks to the fact that the state is the largest single advertiser. Moreover, the existing ownership structures have close ties to political parties ensuring that journalists and editors are operating in a restricted environment with a pronounced culture of self-censorship⁷.

The print media offers a wider range of views and political positions compared to television, however, their distribution and influence is lower than television which is by far the most important source of political information in Macedonia.

The coverage of the election campaign took place against a backdrop of dominance by the ruling party over the opposition, and was characterized by an overall lack of debate and competition of political viewpoints. While at least three TV channels planned to organize debates between presidential candidates, only three such debates eventually took place prior the first round. A debate between the main frontrunners took place only on MRT1 as Mr. Ivanov declined to take part in other debates.⁸

There was a notable tendency to cover the activities of state officials positively, often pointing out achievements and successes. Media coverage of appearances of the president, prime minister, government ministers and local government representatives at ceremonial events and other activities, indirectly benefited the campaign of the ruling party. Critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities, as well as more comprehensive analyses of contestants' platforms were generally absent from the news programs of the main broadcast media. The advantage of the ruling party was also noticeable in the placements of the news stories and the ability to speak directly on camera (so called *direct speech*)

⁷ For more information on the ties between political parties and media ownership structures see *inter alia* the 2014 Media Sustainability Index Report by IREX at: http://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/u105/EE_MSI_2014_Macedonia.pdf

⁸ In addition to the debate on MRT1, National Democratic Institute (NDI) organized two debates that were broadcast on Vesti 24 and some regional TV channels.

The Broadcast Media

Legal framework for the media coverage of elections

The Electoral Code⁹, the 2013 Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services¹⁰ (LAVMS) regulate the media coverage of the election campaign. To further explain the legal requirements for the media coverage of the campaigns, including the period when the presidential and parliamentary campaigns overlap, the AVMS adopted 'Specifics of the monitoring methodology for the 2014 Electoral Process'.¹¹ Article 75.1 of the Electoral Code obliges broadcast media to cover elections in a fair, balanced and unbiased manner. Moreover, broadcasters are obligated to provide equal access for contestants to different types of programs (news programs, special informative programs, debates, and other programs), free and paid political advertising. While all presidential candidates are to be provided with equal coverage, contestants in the parliamentary elections are to be covered proportionally, according to the number of candidate lists they register.

In addition, Article 76(a) 2 of the Code stipulates that MRT should grant equitable access in its information programs in the following way: one third of newscasts are to be devoted to local and international events, one third to the activities of the governing political parties, and one third to the activities of the parliamentary political parties in opposition. The results of the previous parliamentary elections determine the amount of time devoted to the governing and opposition parties. Those political parties who do not have seats in parliament are not legally entitled to any coverage in the newscasts during an election campaign period. Based on the recommendation of the AVMS, MRT allocated additional time in their newscasts to non-parliamentary parties and ethnic-Albanian parties.

Article 61 of the LAVMS obliges all broadcasters to provide objective and unbiased presentation of events with equal treatment of diverse views and opinions. Moreover, when it comes to the programming on MRT, the

⁹ Electoral Code, Official Gazette 40/06, 136/2008, 148/2008, 155/2008, 163/2008, 44/11, 51/11, 142/12, 31/13, 30/14

¹⁰ Official Gazette 184/13, 13/14, 44/14, 101/14, 132/14.

¹¹ http://www.avmu.mk/images/Metodoloski_specifiki.pdf

law provides for continuous, accurate, complete, unbiased, fair and timely information, by creating and broadcasting high-quality programmes on all political, economic, social, health related, cultural, entertaining, educational, scientific, religious, environmental, sporting and other events.

The key regulatory body for the broadcast media is the AVMS, which replaced the Broadcasting Council in 2013. It has responsibility for licensing and overseeing activities of the broadcast media. During elections, the AVMS is obliged to monitor broadcast media and to react to violations of the above-mentioned provisions.

Television



The publicly funded MRT1 generally did not meet its obligation to provide impartial and objective coverage of the election campaign. While it allocated roughly equal proportions of its political and election-related coverage to the SDSM coalition (31 per cent) and the VMRO-DPMNE (36 per cent), the tone of the coverage showed support towards the ruling party. As much as 46 per cent of the VMRO-DPMNE's coverage was positive and 54 per cent was neutral. By contrast, only 7 per cent of the SDSM's coverage was positive and 19 per cent was negative. Moreover, the government received some 14 per cent of the coverage that was also mainly positive or neutral.

As a rule, MRT1 did not provide critical and analytical coverage of the governments' performance. Instead, it mainly ran stories highlighting the achievements and successes of the government and the ruling party (such as higher pensions, new investments, new medical equipment for hospitals etc.). There was also a notable tendency to defend some actions by the VMRO-DPMNE presidential incumbent Gjorge Ivanov – such as his decision not to participate in debates (if not organized by MRT). By contrast, SDSM's candidate Stevo Pendarovski received critical coverage.

In addition, while Mr. Ivanov's pre-election rallies were always well covered with the cameras showing large crowds, coverage of Mr. Pendarovski's pre-election meetings frequently gave the impression of a very poor attendance. While both candidates received similar amount of time to speak directly on camera, news items covering Mr. Ivanov and his activities were often broadcast first giving him an advantage over his opponent.

MRT2 allocated 21 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the VMRO-DPMNE coalition and 7 per cent to the SDSM

coalition. The coverage was mainly positive and neutral. The bulk of the coverage however went to the two Albanian parties – DUI (30 per cent) and DPA (27 per cent). The tone analysis revealed that while 66 per cent of the DPA coverage was positive and 11 per cent negative, as much as 75 per cent of the DUI coverage was positive and only 1 per cent negative. This channel focused primarily on campaign rallies. Voters would have benefited from a more analytical and in-depth coverage to help them assess the alternative programmes of the electoral contestants.



TV Sitel, the most popular private broadcaster, demonstrated clear bias in favor of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE coalition and against the opposition SDSM. The channel gave 42 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the ruling coalition VMRO-DPMNE. 77 per cent of this coverage was positive and only one per cent negative. By contrast, the SDSM coalition received just 17 per cent of the coverage, which was mainly negative (60 per cent) or neutral (38 per cent). TV Sitel allocated 25 per cent of the coverage to the activities of the government – this coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral.

As for the coverage of candidates, Mr. Ivanov obtained more than five times more coverage than his main rival Mr. Pendarovski. Moreover, while the ruling coalition candidate received almost 15 minutes of direct speech, his main opponent was allotted less than one minute of such time. The news items covering activities of the VMRO-DPMNE were invariably presented at the beginning of the news. Similar to MRT1, Sitel was also biased when covering pre-election meetings of the two frontrunners. On a few occasions, TV Sitel journalists did not separate commentary from facts. In one example, TV Sitel journalists opined that Mr. Penderovski would be a bad candidate and Mr. Ivanov would deserve to win. The channel failed to present alternative views in their content, invariably presenting pro-government experts who praised the government activities.



Kanal 5 – another private broadcaster – adopted a similar approach to TV Sitel and demonstrated its support to the current government. It devoted 40 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the government, of which the ruling VMRO-DPMNE coalition received 24 per cent. This coverage was overwhelmingly positive and neutral. By comparison, the SDSM coalition received only 16 per cent of such coverage which was mainly neutral or negative. As for the coverage of the two frontrunners, Mr. Ivanov and Mr. Pendarovski received a comparable amount of time, with the former receiving more positive coverage and the latter receiving more criticism.



TV Alsat-M is the third most popular channel in Macedonia, and the first private channel to broadcast in Albanian. In contrast to TV Sitel and Kanal5, TV Alsat-M provided a more balanced coverage of the government and the VMRO-DPMNE coalition by allocating them comparable amounts of positive and negative coverage. The SDSM coalition, however, was presented in a neutral or positive manner. As for the coverage of the two Albanian parties, the DUI received almost 29 per cent and the DPA 23 per cent of the political and election-related coverage. As much as 64 per cent of the DUI's coverage was positive and only 2 per cent was negative. By comparison, only 30 per cent of the DPA's coverage was positive and 22 per cent was negative.

The qualitative analysis of Alsat-M news programmes revealed that all the main presidential candidates were allowed to communicate their message directly to voters, and there was no preferential treatment of candidates in terms of positioning of news items.



In comparison with the aforementioned TV channels, Telma TV provided its viewers with a more balanced picture of the campaign. While it allocated more coverage to the SDSM coalition (24 per cent) compared to the VMRO-DPMNE, the tone of the coverage for both coalitions was mainly neutral. The same could be said about the coverage of the government as well as the coverage of the two Albanian parties.

The qualitative analysis revealed that Telma was pursuing a generally objective and neutral editorial line, and did not hesitate to criticize the government and the ruling coalition. It also covered a wide range of different issues, including social and economic problems of the country. All the main presidential candidates were allowed to communicate their message directly to voters, and there was no preferential treatment of candidates in terms of positioning of news items or manipulative use of film, sound or pictures.



24 News (Vesti) is a private channel (broadcasting on a satellite license) that provided balanced coverage of the campaign. It devoted 25 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the VMRO-DPMNE and 24 per cent to the SDSM. This coverage was mainly neutral or negative. The coverage of the government and the two Albanian parties was also balanced.

Similar to Telma, the qualitative analysis revealed that 24 Vesti pursued an objective editorial line, criticizing all relevant political entities. As mentioned above, the channel broadcast debates between presidential candidates which provided a good opportunity for candidates to present their platforms. However, the value to the viewers was reduced by Mr. Ivanov's decision not to participate.

Radio



Macedonian public radio consists of three national channels, a satellite channel, and a non-profit regional channel. Similar to the public television channel MRT1, the public radio channel MR1 also tilted slightly towards the ruling coalition. While it allocated almost equal time to the two main frontrunners – 29 per cent to the VMRO-DPMNE coalition and 26 per cent to the SDSM coalition – the tone of the coverage indicated preferential treatment of VMRO-DPMNE. Eleven per cent of the VMRO-DPMNE coverage was positive and only two per cent was negative. By comparison, only three per cent of the SDSM coverage was positive and twelve per cent was negative.

The channel adopted a similar approach when covering activities of the two main contestants who both received roughly one hour of the channel's political and election-related news coverage. Mr. Pendarovski received slightly more direct time than Mr. Ivanov. However, as for the tone of the coverage, Mr. Pendarovski received more negative coverage and Mr. Ivanov more positive coverage.



In general, the private radio Kanal 77 provided a more balanced coverage of the campaign than MR1. It gave almost equal coverage to the SDSM (22 per cent) and the VMRO-DPMNE coalition (20 per cent). The tone of the coverage was mainly neutral or positive for both coalitions. The government received only four per cent of the coverage, and was mainly negative in tone. As for the coverage of the two Albanian parties, the DPA was allocated 16 per cent and the DUI obtained 11 per cent.

Newspapers

Print media provided a wider range of views than television, often showing bias in favour or against particular political options, but generally failed to provide deeper analytical and investigative reporting.

Дневник

While Dnevnik allocated slightly more of its political and election-related coverage to the SDSM coalition (23 per cent) than the VMRO-DPMNE coalition (19 per cent), the tone of the coverage indicated clear favoritism towards the current establishment and against the opposition. In addition, Mr. Ivanov was the only presidential candidate to purchase paid political advertising. The coverage of the campaign was limited to news reports from rallies, without providing any deeper analysis or context. Moreover, government activities were shown mainly in a positive light, focusing on their achievements and successes such as the creation of new jobs, but failing to mention the high rate of unemployment.

Република

Similar to Dnevnik, Republika also showed its support to the VMRO-DPMNE coalition which received 28 per cent of mainly positive and neutral coverage. By contrast, the SDSM coalition was allocated 57 per cent of the coverage that was very negative. The coverage of the government (9 per cent) was also mainly positive.

Фокус

Weekly Fokus was the only newspaper to provide more analytical coverage of the campaign. It adopted a very critical position towards the president (16 per cent), the government (20 per cent) and the ruling VMRO-DPMNE coalition (28 per cent). Coverage of the SDSM coalition (18 per cent) was mainly neutral or positive coverage. Fokus also published interviews with two presidential candidates – Mr. Pendarovski and Mr. Popovski – as Mr. Ivanov and Mr. Halimi refused this opportunity.



Sloboden Pecat allocated 35 per cent of its coverage to the VMRO-DPMNE coalition and 29 per cent to the SDSM coalition. While the coverage of the latter was mainly positive or neutral, the ruling powers were heavily criticized. The paper, mainly through its editorials, called on voters to vote for Mr. Pendarovski.



The monitoring of online publication Nova focused on both its video and print versions. As for the print version, the coverage of the two main coalitions was balanced. In its video version, TV Nova was critical of the government that received 15 per cent of the coverage. By contrast, the SDSM coalition received 56 per cent of the coverage that was mainly neutral or positive. The VMRO-DPMNE coalition received only 9 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral or negative.

6. Conclusion & Recommendations

Data from the monitoring period revealed that most monitored media did not provide ample information on election campaign in their news programmes, making it more difficult for voters to make a fully informed choice. This is *inter alia* due to the fact that public media serve the interests of the authorities and private media are controlled by financial and political groups and serve to their own interests, and not the interests of the readers or viewers. Journalists need to be more proactive rather than reactive in their coverage of elections to better facilitate the exchange of opinions, public debate, investigation and commentary that would offer the public fully informed, analyzed and assessed views of the candidates seeking elected office. A number of important reforms and changes will be necessary in order for the media to provide voters with more objective and balanced coverage of the campaign.

The freedom and independence of the media must be respected. Objective reporting is essential for a well-functioning democracy, particularly during the election campaign. State authorities should refrain from interfering in activities of the media and journalists as it undermines their independence.

Media reporting should be balanced and factual, including coverage of the activities of the authorities. Media should be able to criticize activities or inaction by the authorities and other official bodies whose activities are financed from the public money, to investigate corruption and other wrongdoings and they should not face any pressure in the form of retaliation.

Authorities should consider amendments to the current legislation (and implement the existing legislation as required) to strengthen MRT's mandate so it reflects public interests and is based on independence, editorial freedom, and non-interference by political parties.

The controlling bodies of the public broadcast media (MRT) should be structured in a way to ensure programming complies with its public

service remit. The appointment procedures for the Director General and for other members of the management and controlling organs should be independent, transparent and free of political interference. The controlling organs should have a more diverse membership, including representatives of civil society active and experienced in the media field. This is particularly important in view of the fact that MRT has tended to yield to political pressure, adjusting its editorial line with a view to satisfy political interests rather than the public interest.

If the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS) is to be respected as an independent and credible media regulator, consideration should be given to improving the current system of appointing their members. It would be advisable to ensure that AVMS's membership is diverse, including experts with media background and experience, selected *inter alia* from civil society organizations dealing with the freedom of expression.

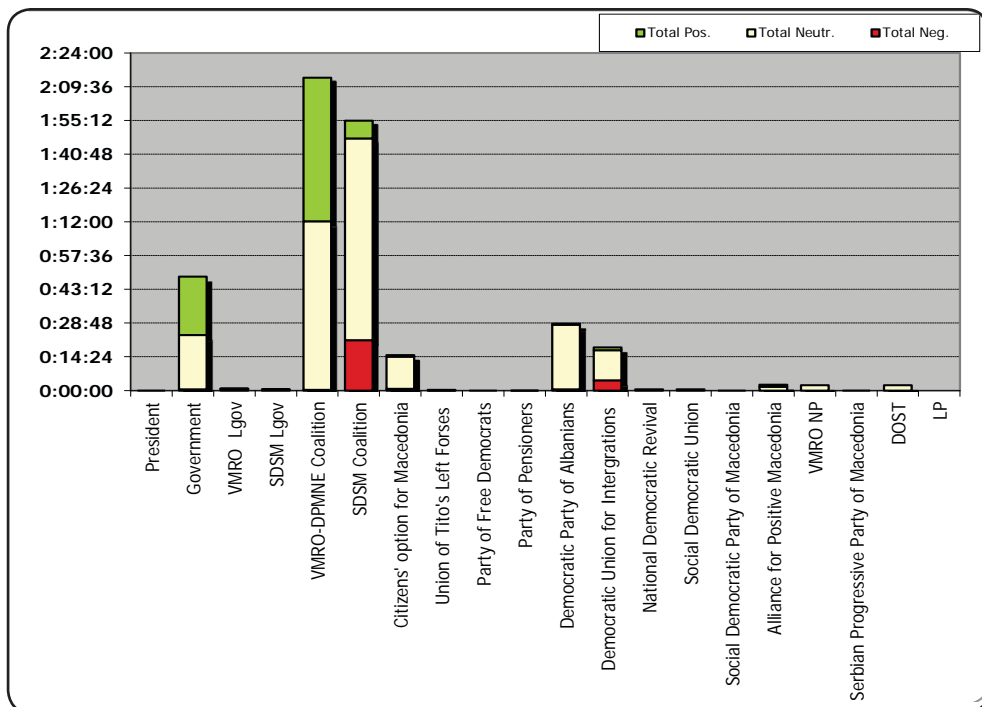
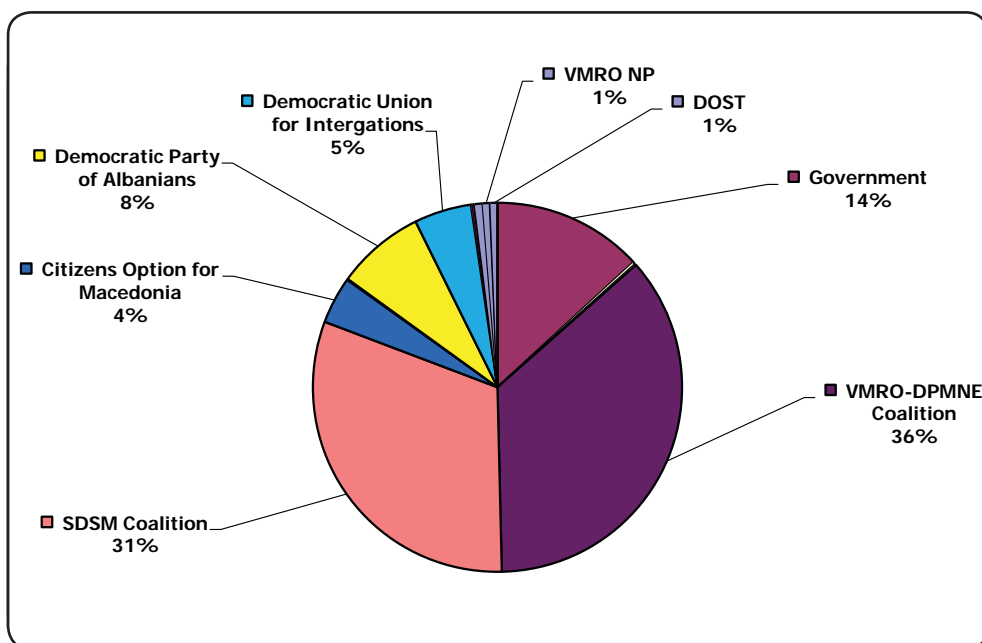
Consideration should be given to strengthening the current accountability mechanisms—for the failure to provide public information or for not imparting public information in a timely manner.

Annexes

Presidential and early parliamentary elections Macedonia 2014

MRT 1 - news programs

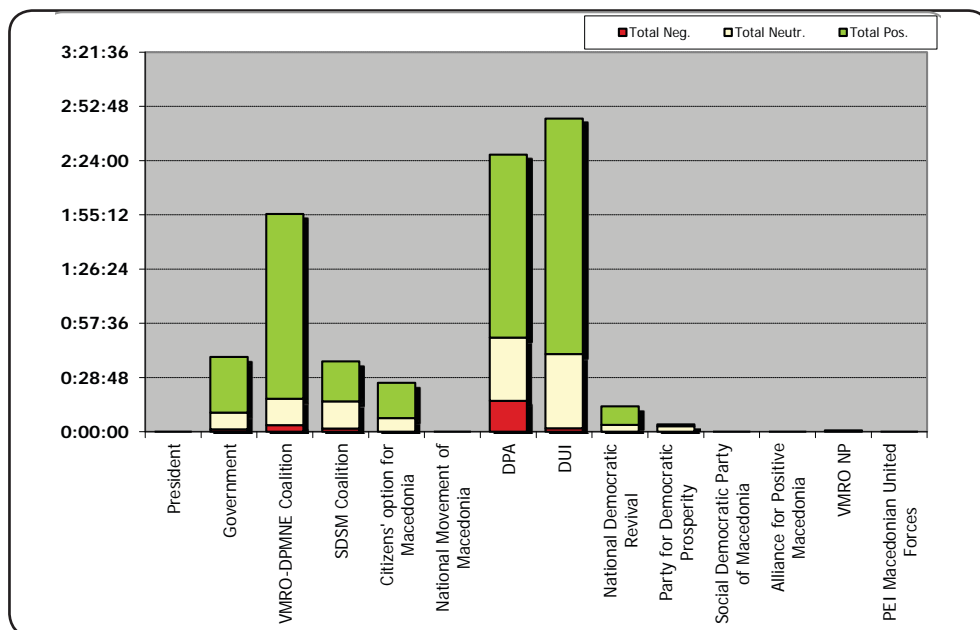
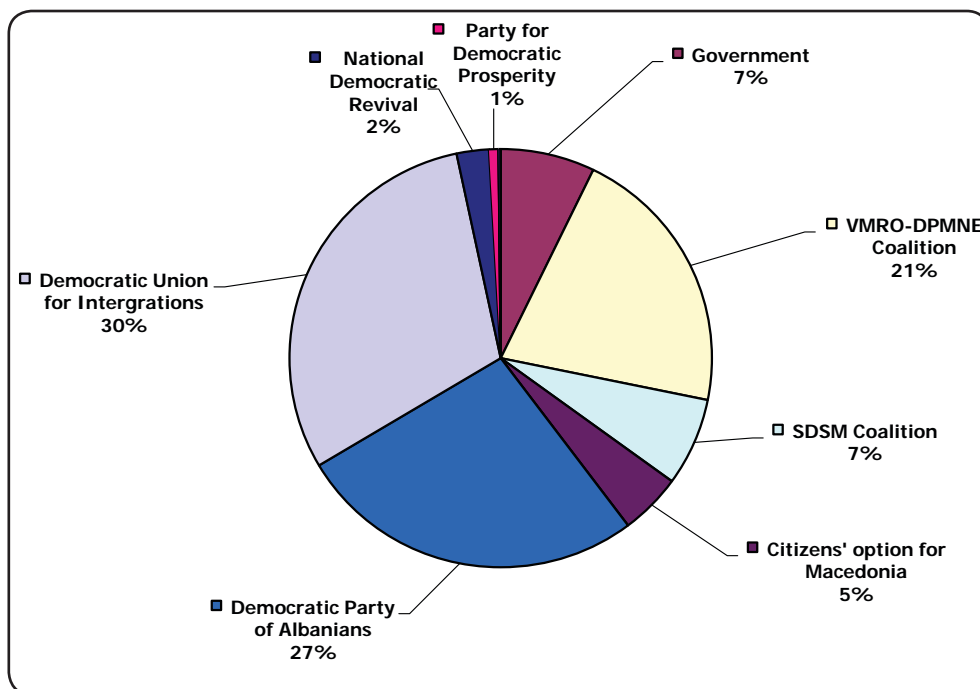
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Presidential and early parliamentary elections Macedonia 2014

MRT 2 - news programs

17/3/14 - 11/4/14

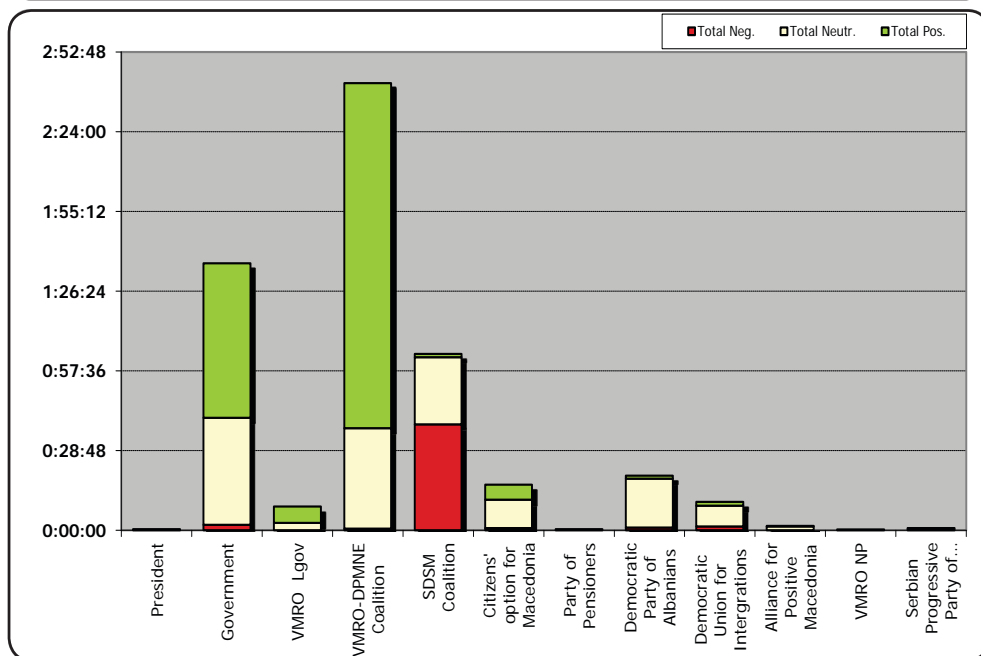
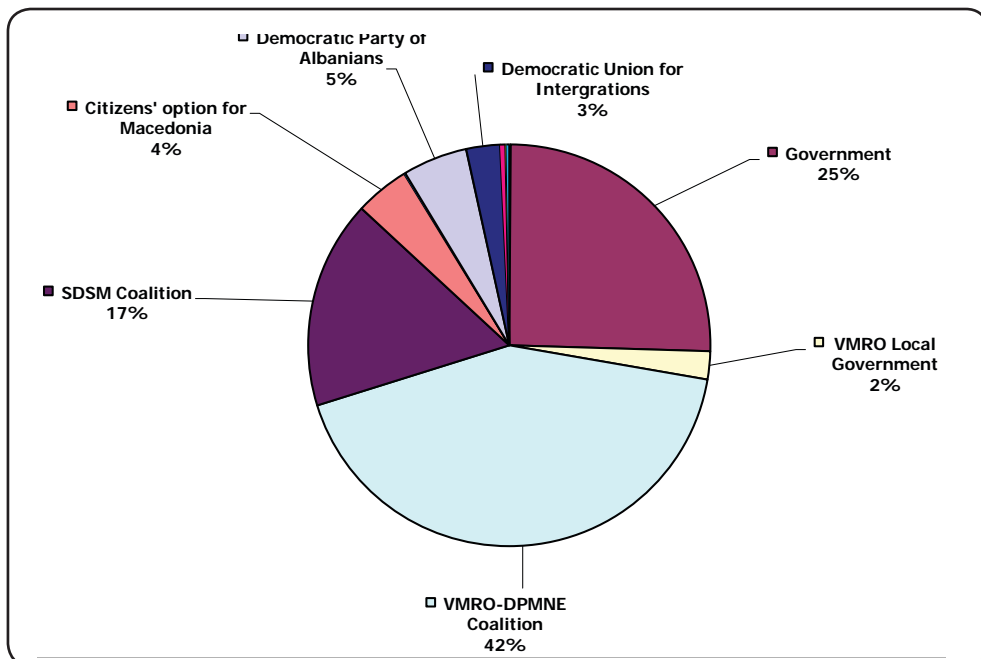


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Sitel - news programs

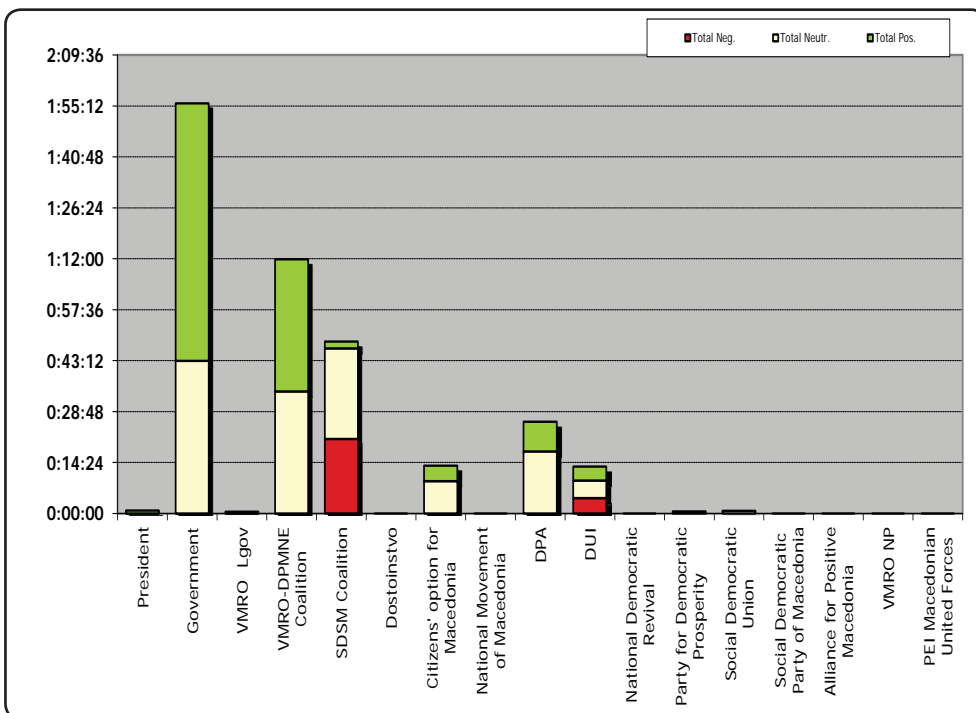
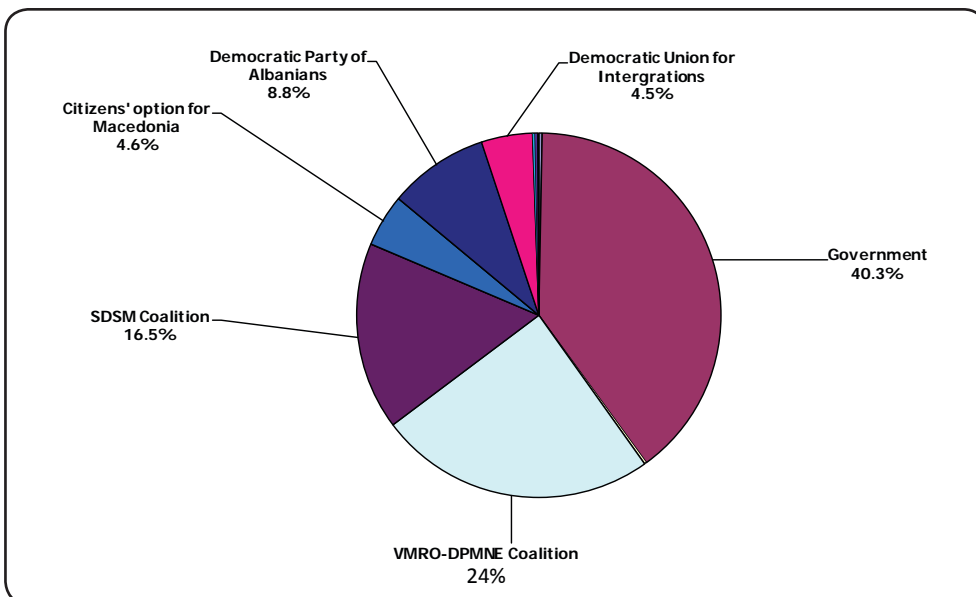
17/3/14 - 11/4/14



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Kanal 5 - news programs

17/3/14 - 11/4/14

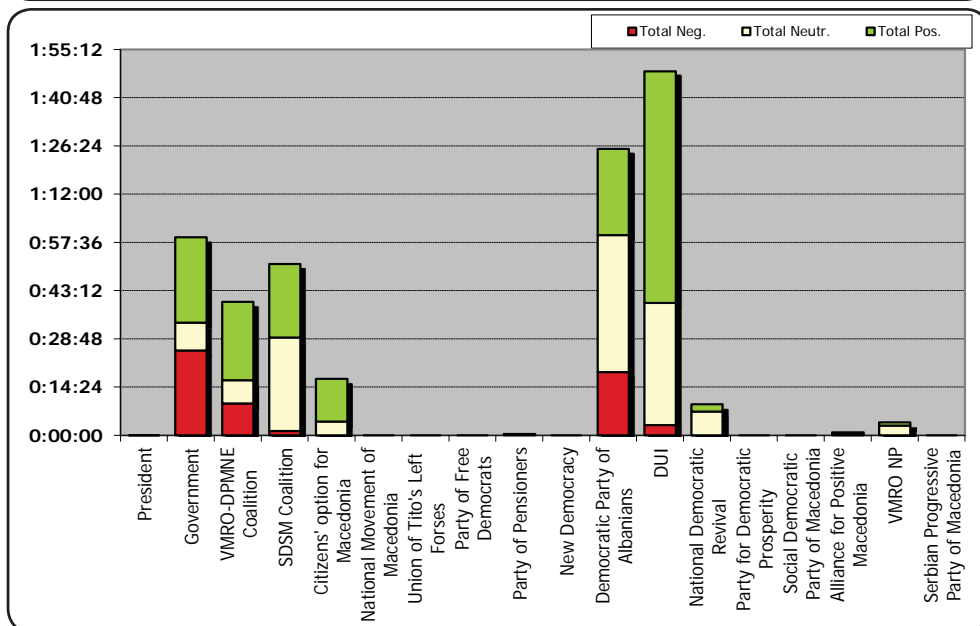
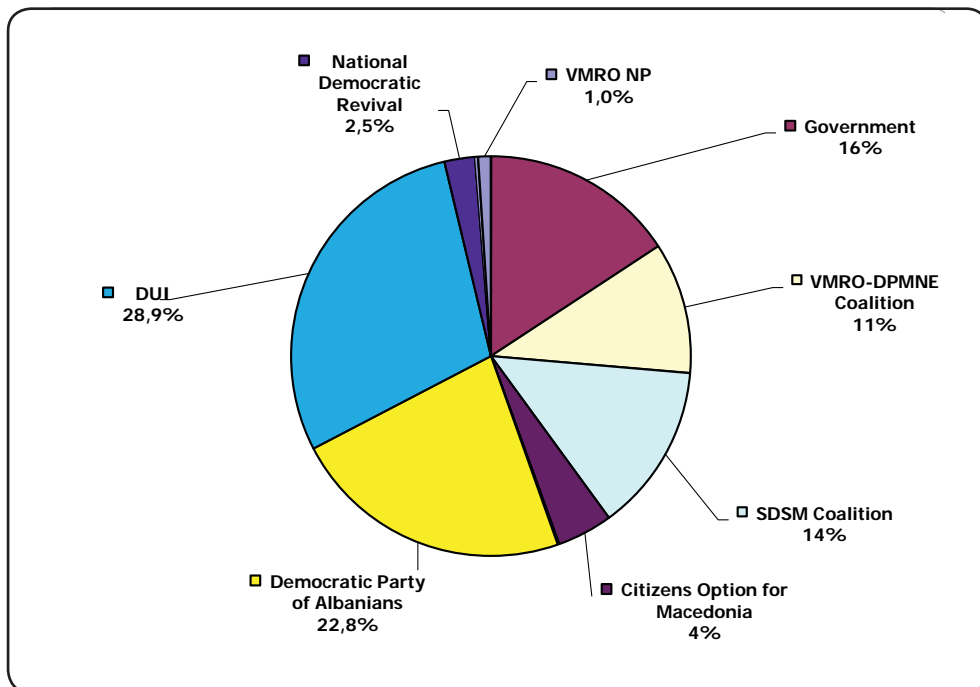


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Alsat TV - news programs

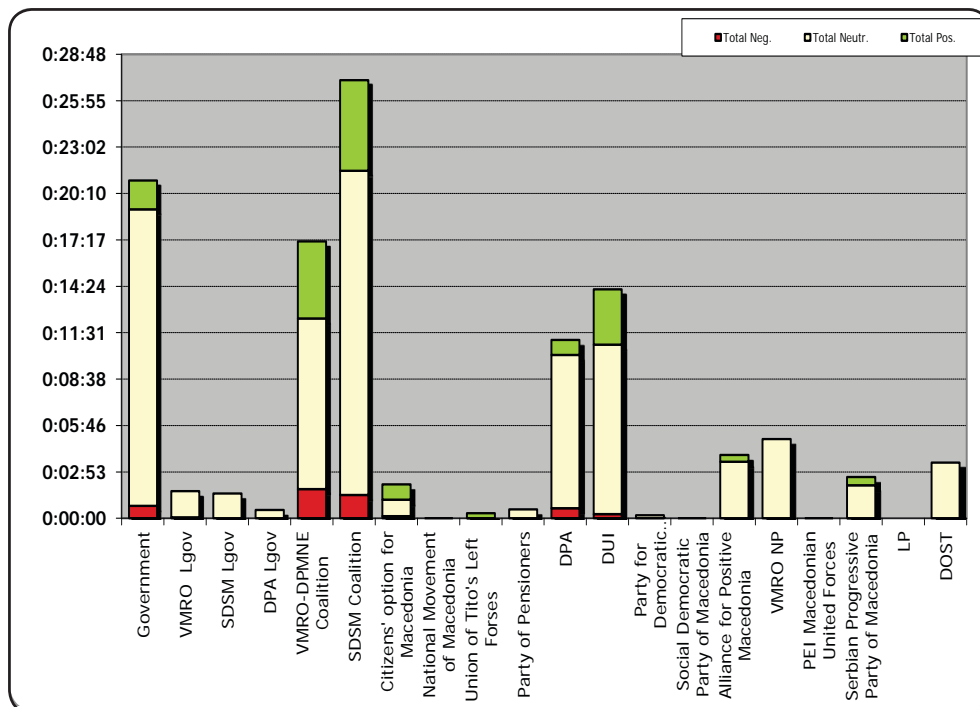
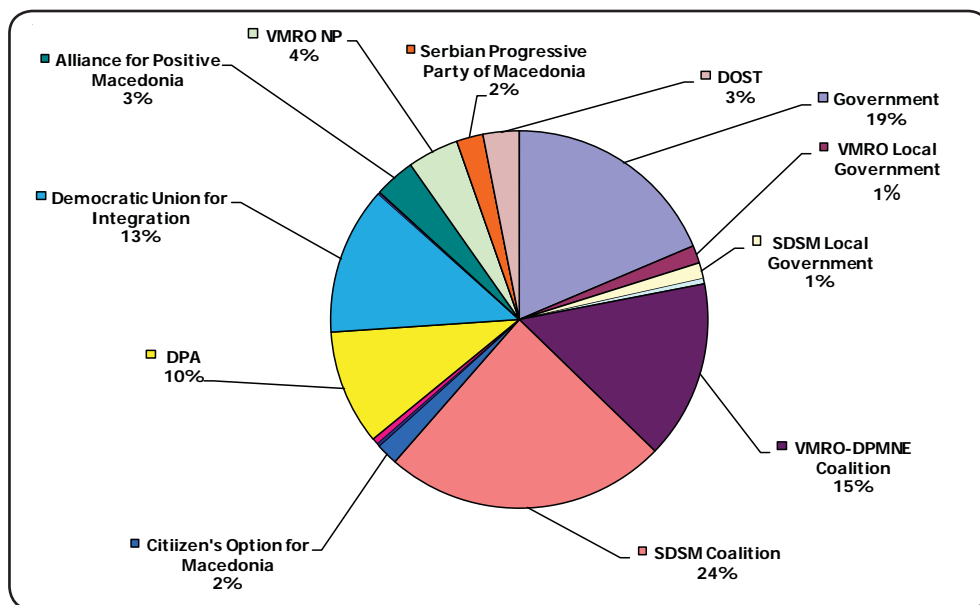
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Telma TV - news programs

17/3/14 - 11/4/14

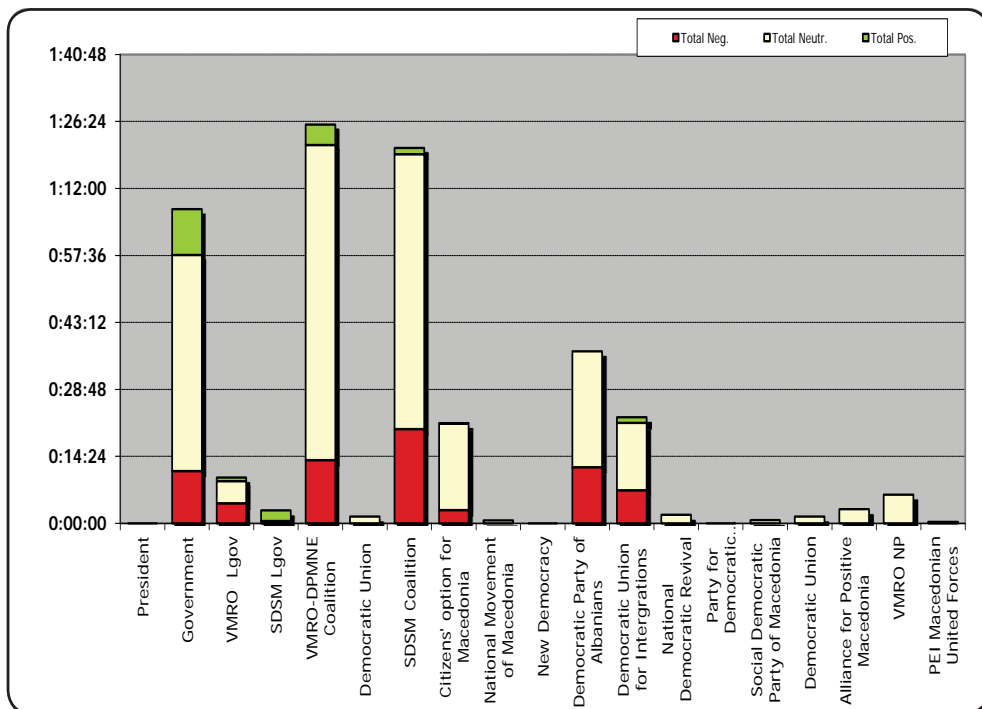
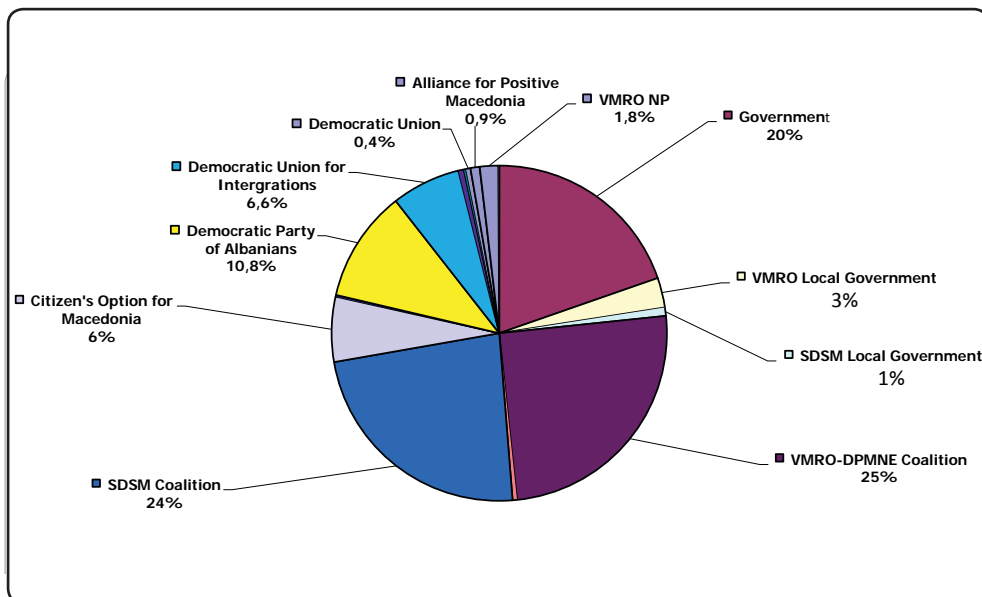


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24 Vesti - news programs

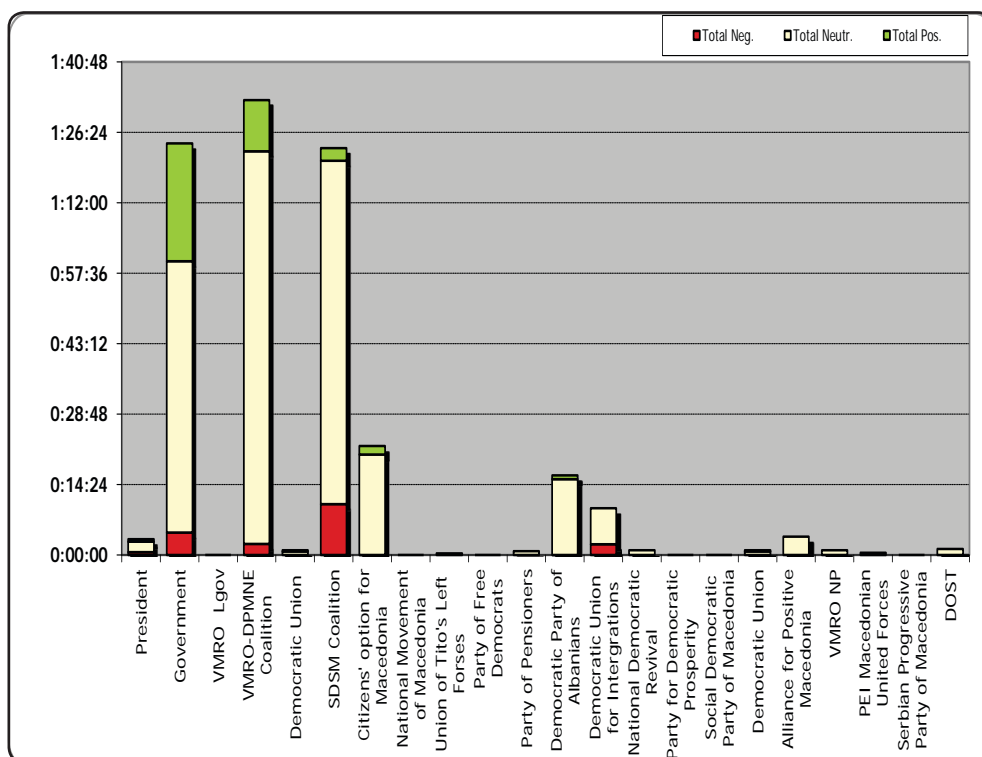
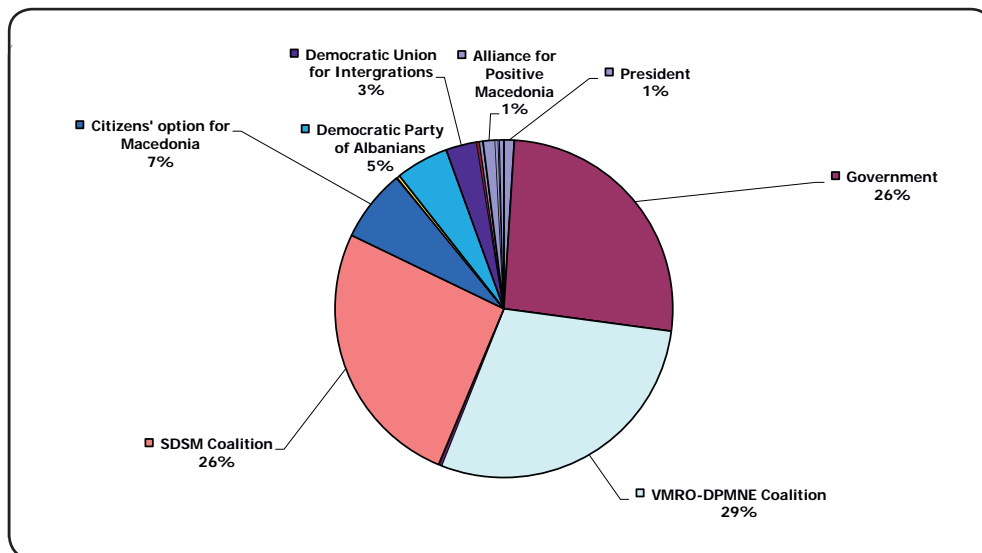
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Macedonian Public Radio - news programs

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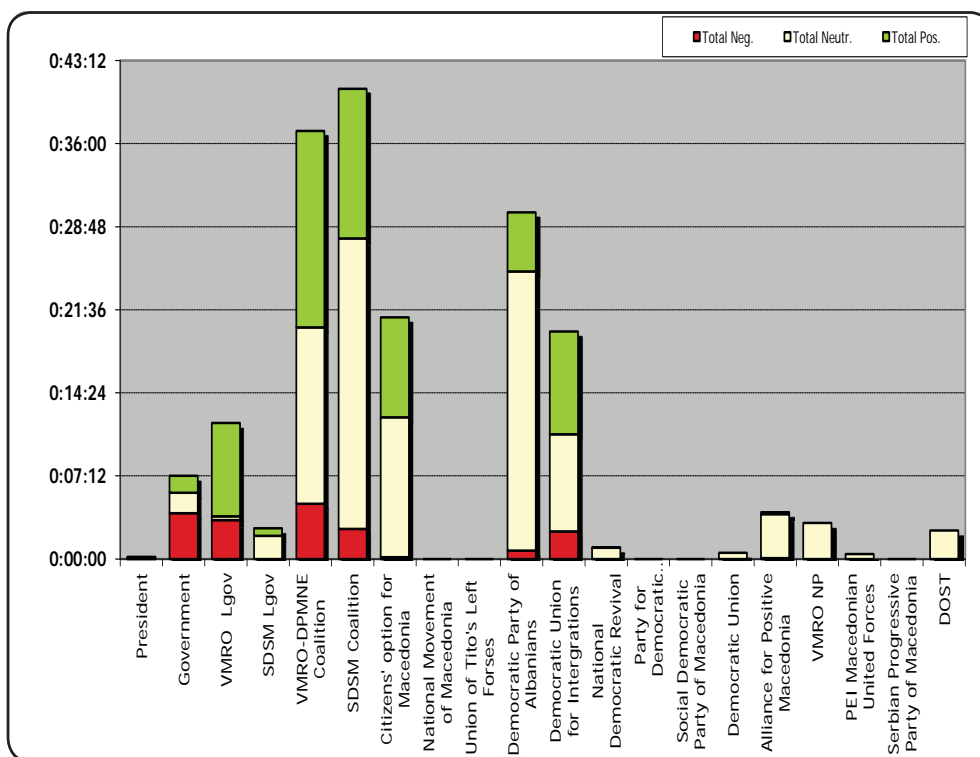
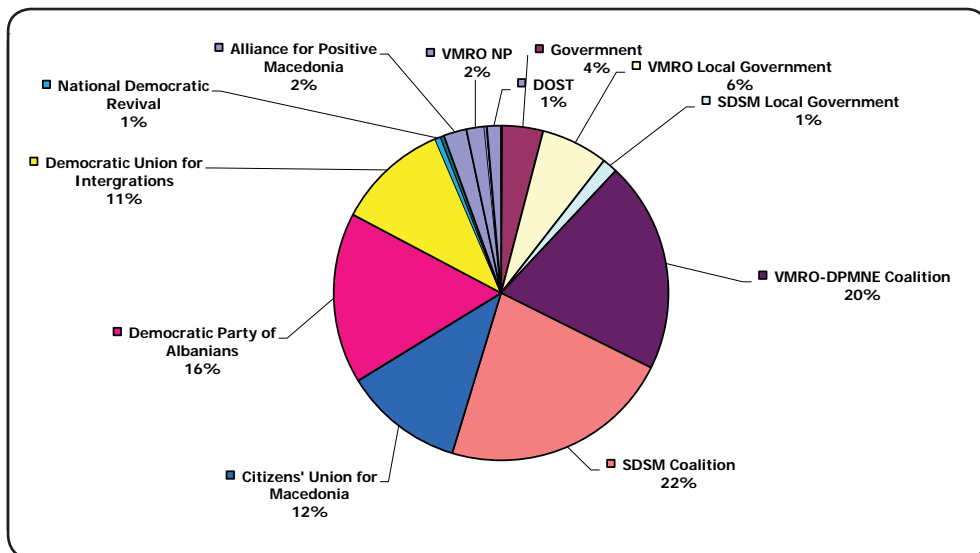


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Radio Kanal 77 - news programs

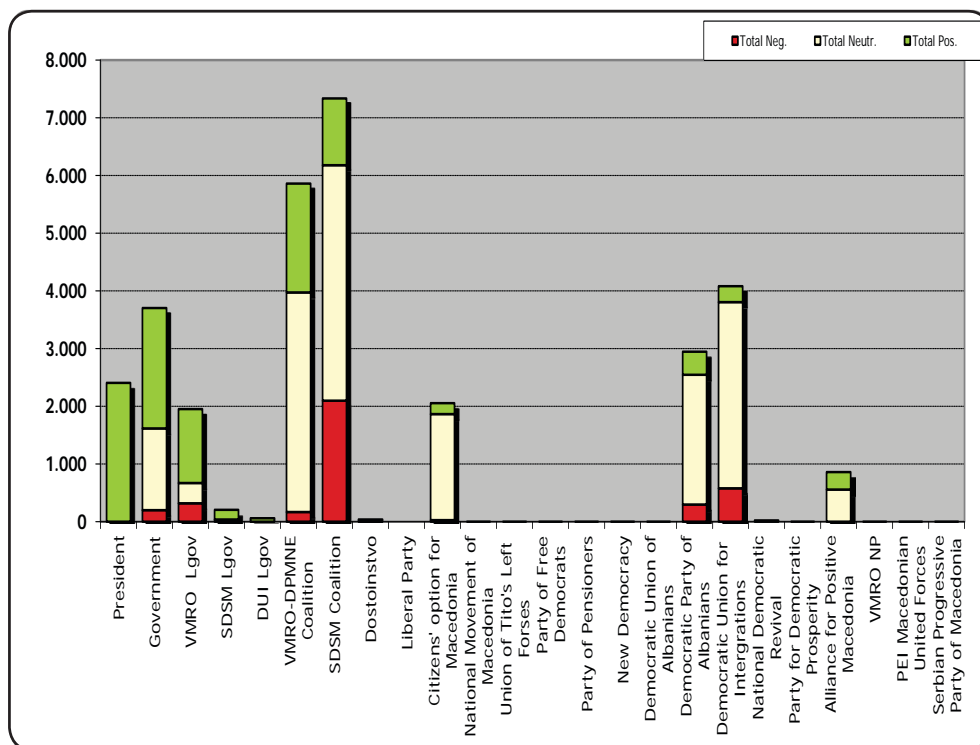
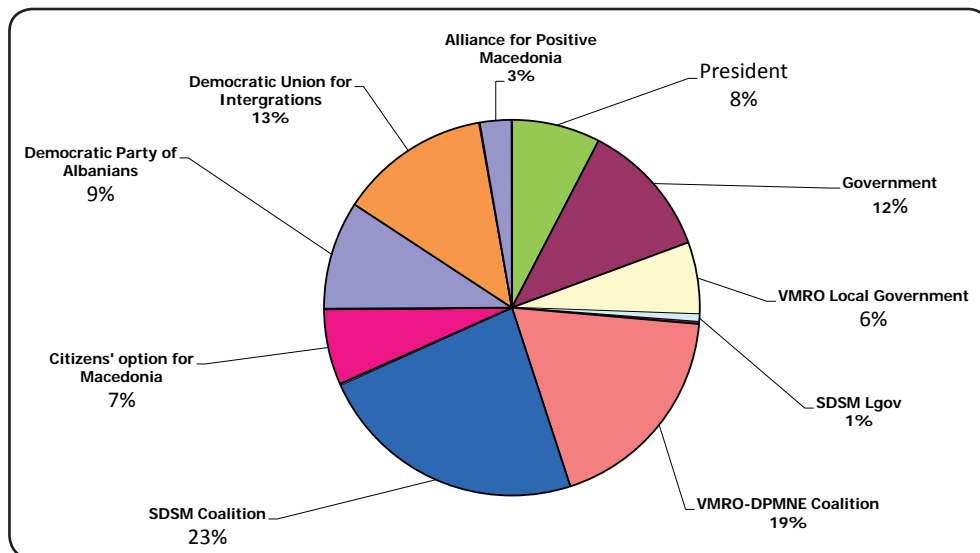
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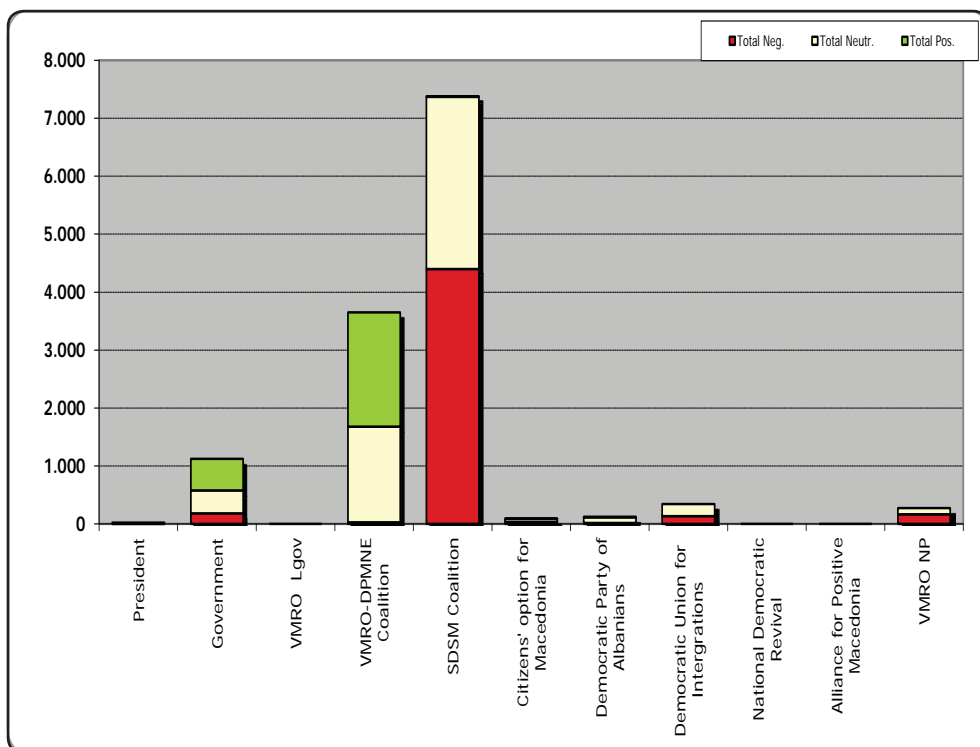
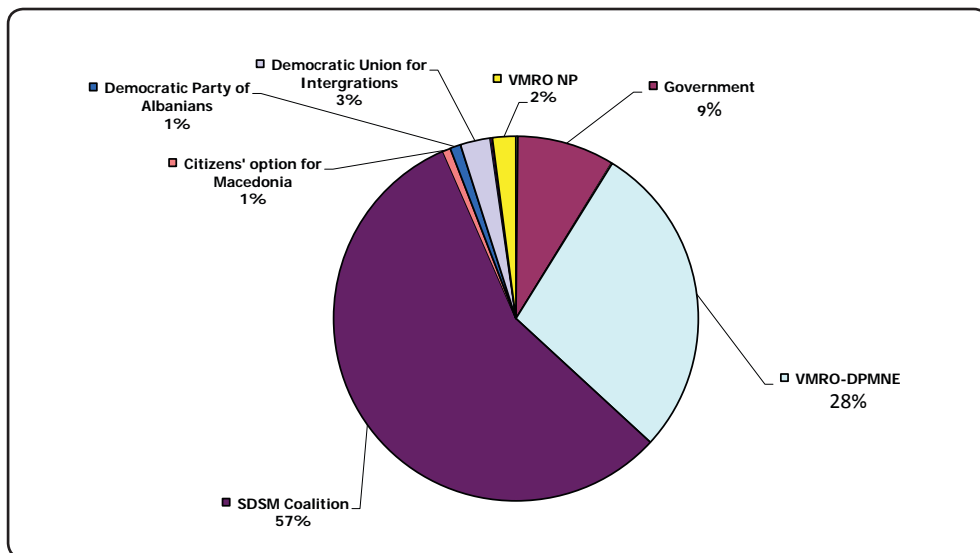
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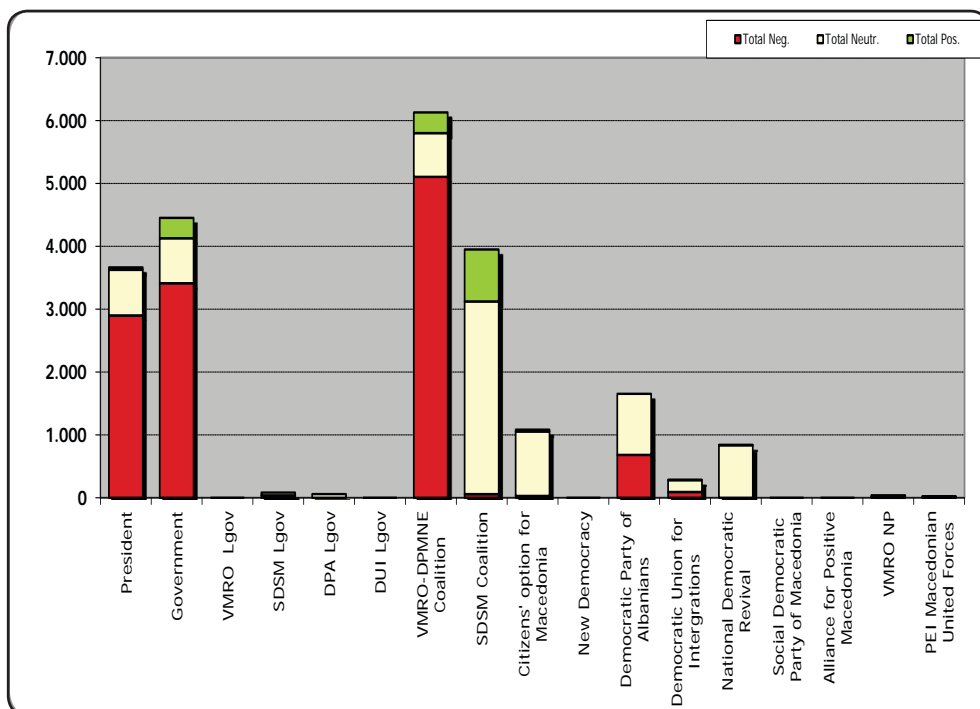
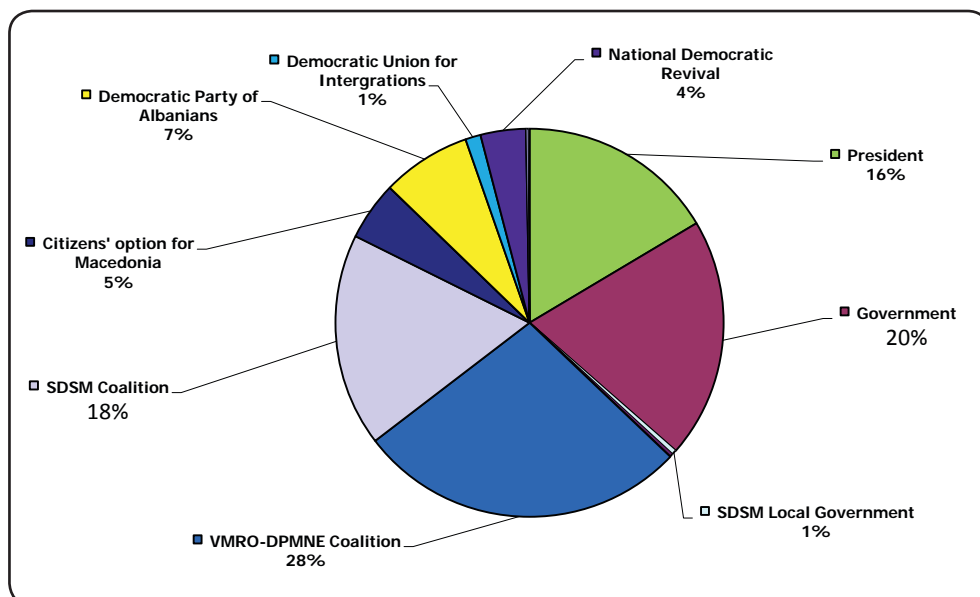
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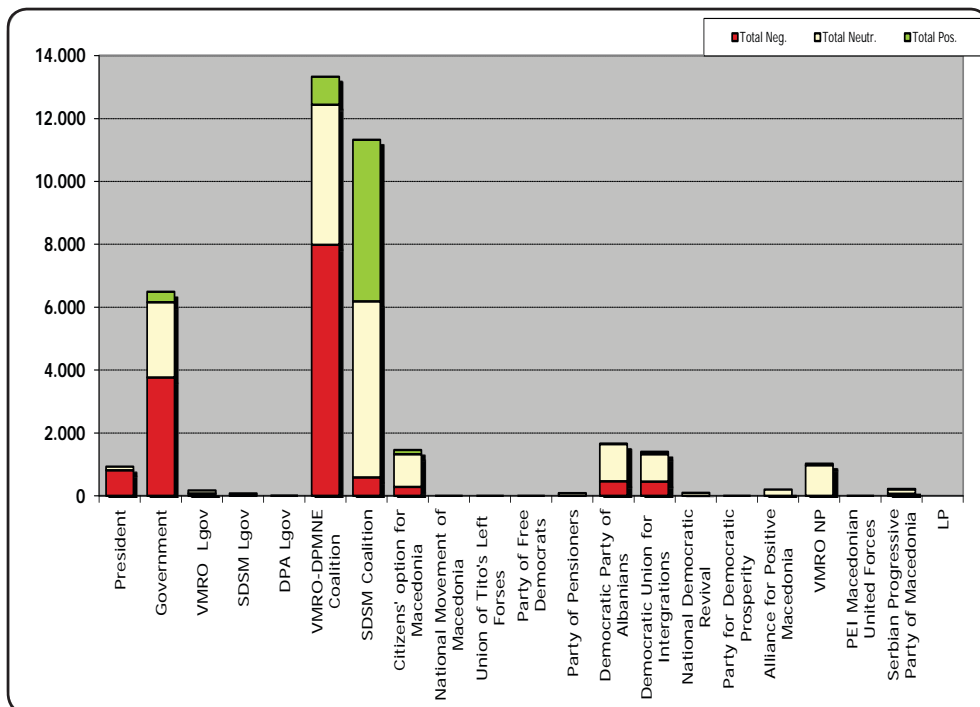
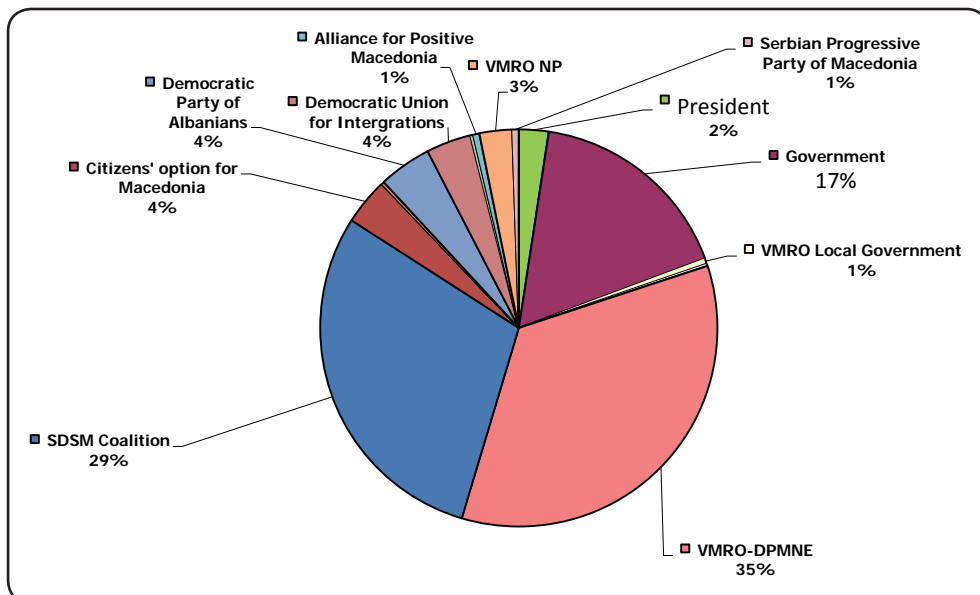
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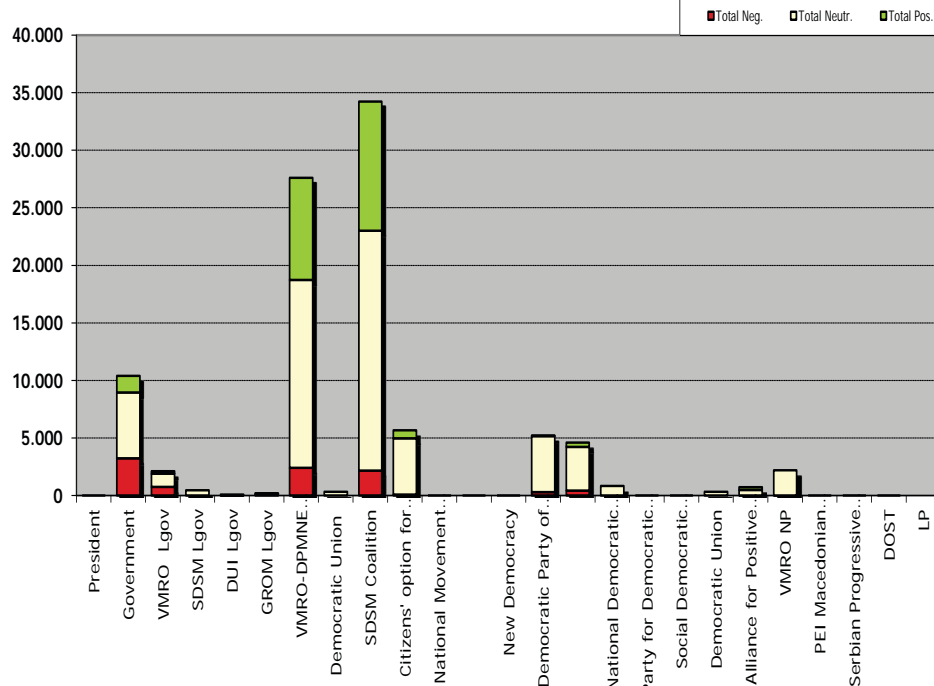
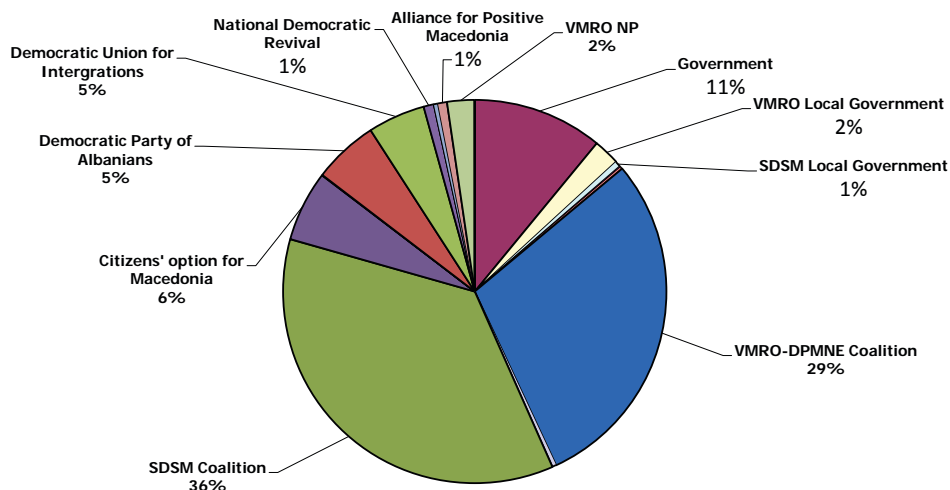
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Nova - print version

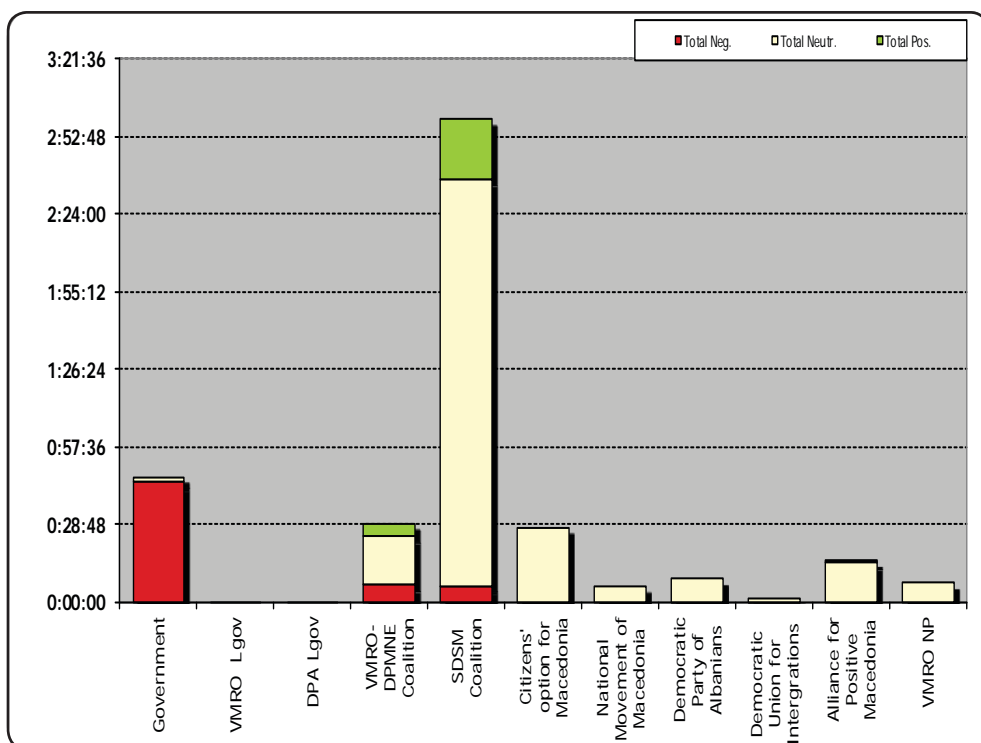
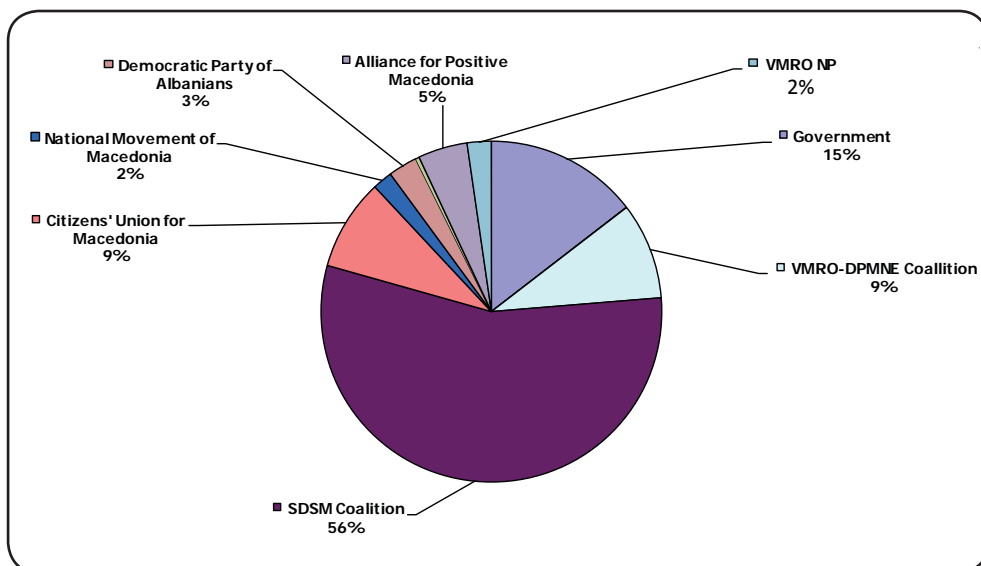
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TV Nova - online version (video)

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