

Monitoring of primetime news programmes of five most watched TV stations in Montenegro

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Monitoring of television news programmes started on 15 May, so the period of monitoring of television stations has been somewhat shorter than of other media included in this report.

HRA monitored the main news programmes of five most watched television stations in Montenegro: TV Vijesti, PINK M, TVCG, Prva and Atlas. These televisions were ranked as the most watched in the research conducted by the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) in July 2012 on OSCE initiative and released in November 2012. Corresponding data was published in February and March by TV Vijesti, referring to the rating of Extra TV, and research that IPSOS Strategic Puls conducted upon its request.

All TV stations, whose central news programmes we monitored, violated principles of the Code. The news programmes of TV PINK had the highest number of violations, 30, followed by a significantly lower number of violations, TV Vijesti with 15 and TVCG with 14. These are the three most watched television stations in Montenegro. TV Atlas had six violations and TV Prva 3 violations of the Code.

Except for the total number of recorded violations of the Code, TV Pink M also stands out with the number of violations of Principle 3, which suggests that commentary should be separated from the information. There were 13 violations of this principle in the TV Pink M news programmes, while the number of recorded violations of this principle is much smaller in relation to other broadcasters, three violations by TV Vijesti, and 2 by Television of Montenegro.

In relation to Principle 8 that deals with privacy and dignity of a person, only one violation by TV Vijesti was observed in relation to the insinuation of suicide of a victim of traffic accident.

However, it should be noted that all television stations violated Principle 8 by disclosing the identity of persons killed and injured in accidents or crimes. Sometimes information on their health, such as their recovery, deterioration of health or death is published a few days after the event. As it was not possible to determine whether this information is published with the consent of the named persons or their families, these cases were not reported as a violation. We noted that the Code requires respect for privacy and dignity, and we recommended that the identity of victims of accidents and violence, and information about their health, should not be published without the consent of victims or their families. Exceptions may be public figures.

Violations of Principles 10, the presumption of innocence, are fewer in television programmes than in the print and online media, even fifty times less. Possible explanations for such a difference could be that television stations allocate far less space to crime section, and the fact that there are no headlines and subtitles on television, which contain the most violations of this principle in other media.

Principle 11, which deals with the prohibition of publishing hidden advertising, was violated more by monitored television programmes than in print or online media.

Broadcasting the so-called PR material is unacceptable in news programmes and represents a violation of the Code. Such information, regardless of whether they were paid or not, may be, with clear labelling, broadcasted in other television programmes and formats, but not in the news.

Violations of Principle 2, which states that “a journalist should be sharp observer of those who have social, political and economic power”, were not observed in TV news programmes for two reasons. The first is that the principle is not well explained through guidelines, and is therefore difficult to apply. In addition, the current principle can be interpreted as interference in the freedom of media editorial policy. The only exception is the public service - TVCG editorial policy should be subjected to criticism, i.e. the public has the right to discuss the editorial policy of this media outlet and compliance with programme principles.

However, we believe that the oversights in access and processing of published topics in news programmes of TVCG can be assessed through principles 1 and 3, which was done in this report.

The editorial policy may decide not to deal with some topics, i.e. simply not to report on some events. In order to assess the editorial policy of TVCG in that manner, the monitoring would have to be far more extensive and have a different task, and should include an analysis of events, what we were unable to do.

For the same reason, because it deals with what was not published, we did not note violations of Principle 12, or its part that states that journalists must be in solidarity with each other and protect their rights. However, it is noted that no television, except TV Vijesti, published information about an incident between journalists and photographers of daily Vijesti and Vladimir Popović (director of the Institute for Public Policy), i.e. they did not publish that their fellow journalists reported to the Police that Mr. Popović obstructed them in performing their duties. Several days after the incident, PINK M broadcasted several reports (commentaries), which contained no statements of Vijesti journalists or their representatives. A few days later, Television of Montenegro broadcasted a statement from the Prime Minister Đukanović about the case in which he said that the incident had been construed.