



Balkan Investigative Reporting Network

BIRN Macedonia Annual Narrative Report

2013

About

BIRN Macedonia, an independent NGO, was founded in 2004 as part of the regional Balkan Investigative Reporting Network.

It has since implemented various local and regional projects, from organising the training of journalists on international standards of journalism to coverage of transitional justice issues, production of TV documentaries, publishing of analysis and investigations, and the organisation of round tables on issues related to the country's EU integration.

BIRN Macedonia has built a reputation not only of being a credible media organisation but also of being a source for media development and network building. It has also fostered strong relationships both with media and CSOs in the country and in the region, and runs locally relevant programmes designed to respond to media and wider societal needs. BIRN Macedonia has contributed to different projects of the Regional BIRN Network and has been crucial in establishing Balkan Insight as one of the leading regional media outlets.

BIRN Macedonia aims to consolidate the country's stability and accelerate its political, economic and social reform within its chosen framework of Euro-Atlantic integration. It does so through high-quality journalism and facilitation of cross-sector debate on key challenges.

Annual activities for 2013

During the reporting period for the first project year BIRN Macedonia implemented all the activities planned with the annual work plan.

- **Technical assistance to journalists and providing room for reporting and advocating:**

This activity was planned as one of the two pillars of the Project for Investigative Journalism and Cooperation between Media and Civil Society. Its implementation started in April with opening a call for investigative stories. This activity was implemented together with the partner organizations Center for Investigative Journalism – SCOOP Macedonia and Center for Civil Communications.

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Another call was also opened in September. On both calls that were opened for all journalists, employed or not, about 70 applications were received. A commission of seven members, both from BIRN Macedonia staff as well as partner organizations awarded 10 journalists with financial means to investigate their ideas. Five of the stories were published on project web-site Prizma at the end of the year, and five more were prepared and planned for January and February 2014.

Some of the stories were also re-published in different media.

The awarded journalists were designated with a mentor who was responsible for their work and who was guiding them, editing their article and helping them in the process of investigating and writing the story ensuring it to be written by BIRN standards. All the stories also had a legal screening before being published. BIRN Macedonia staff was all the time at disposal providing information and contacts of needed CSOs needed for the investigations.

Developing of the project web-site Prizma started in July and it was opened in December due to few problems with design of the site. Apart from the investigative stories several blogs were also published, as well as 12 resources/tools for journalists and NGOs were attached/published, 13 articles informing about NGO activities were published and dozens of stories and articles from other BIRN projects were translated and published. Data bases for journalists and CSOs were developed where about 40 journalists and 60 CSOs were registered.

- Strengthening the Skills of the Macedonia Journalists:

In August five Macedonian journalists were chosen on an open call to take participation at the BIRN Summer School for Investigative reporting 2013 which was held in Bled, Slovenia. BIRN Summer School is a noticeable and highly evaluated event where every year since 2010 experienced and prominent trainers and journalists visit and share their experience with about 30 journalists from Balkan countries. At the end of the School teams formed by the participants from different countries suggest ideas for investigations. In 2013 four out of five Macedonian journalists were included in the teams whose ideas were granted with the possibility to research and investigate.

- Media Coverage Research:

During 2013, Media coverage research was conducted, one of the two planned during the Project. The goal of the media monitoring is to show how often the media in Macedonia conduct investigative stories, on which topics and on what scale the CSOs are included in every day reporting.

The media monitoring was conducted by one of the partner organizations – Center for Civil Communications (CCC).

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After media and CSO's representatives defined the list of issues of common interest that need to be more and better elaborated in the public, methodology for monitoring of media coverage of those issues was developed. The first draft was issued during May 2013, and after a series of consultations and inputs from the partner organizations, the final version of the methodology was adopted in June 2013.

The monitoring was conducted on five media (MTV1 – nationwide television, public service, in Macedonian; Alsat M – nationwide television, private, in Albanian; Tera TV – local (regional) television, private, in Macedonian; Dnevnik – nationwide daily; in Macedonian and Vest - nationwide daily; in Macedonian) during period of three months – April, May and June.

It is expected, the methodology and the questionnaires to provide answers to the following questions:

- In what extent do media report on each of the selected issues?
- Have the basic professional standards in those reports met?
- Is the media coverage balanced and objective?
- Whether they consulted all sides in the story?
- Are the media products driven by independent and original research of the journalists or they are just reports on events organized or initiated on these topics?
- Whether and in what extent the media reports contain the elements such as: credibility, relevance, confidence and credibility?

The results of the monitoring and the analyses were finished by the end of the year. Those information are to be used for preparing the content of the workshops for journalists and CSOs planned for the second project year, where both stakeholders will be trained how to cooperate and how to work together for bigger visibility in the public and more credible and objective articles.

- **Enhancing Journalists and CSOs Cooperation:**

This activity as the second pillar of the Project started with Detecting common issues between media and Civil society. BIRN Macedonia in cooperation with CCC organized an initial debate meant for a large number of CSOs and journalists who debated which are the priority topics that have to be covered in Macedonia. More than 90 CSO representatives and journalists took part in the debate organized on April 17. Ten issues of common interest were detected and agreed on the debate and later distributed to all participants.

After the initial debate even though 7 were planned BIRN Macedonia organized 10 smaller debates for all ten issues that were detected. These debates with 12-15 participants from both media and CSOs were a good chance these two communities to talk closely and openly about the problems and issues they face but also on how to improve their cooperation.

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As a result of the debates more than 15 articles were published by different media which included ideas/topics that were discussed on the debates. An interesting and worth mentioning example is the regular cooperation that Radio Free Europe in Macedonia established after one of the debates with different CSOs for writing weekly column.

- Sharing Information and News Reporting Materials With Other Balkan Countries:

The third partner of the project – KOD/Koha was responsible for implementing this activity. KOD TV Magazine had assignment to prepare and broadcast 2 investigative programs during the 2013. However, KOD succeeded to prepare 4 programs and broadcast them during the period of September-December. The first program was aired on September 29 and was about pollution of Skopje and its surroundings by "Zelezarnica". According to the metering by NGB Nielsen this program reached an audience of about 65.000.

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