



Balkan Investigative Reporting Network

BIRN Macedonia Annual Narrative Report

2014

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 2014

Overview of the implementation of the program activities of the project is following

- **Enhancing cooperation between CSO's and journalists**

BIRN Macedonia in partnership with the Center for Civil Communication (CCC) has concluded a series of ten workshops aimed at boosting cooperation between journalists and the NGO sector. Around 100 participants were involved in the events, with 47 representatives of local and national NGOs and 50 journalists, coming from different media outlets. Each workshop was organized in a different part of Macedonia, making them accessible for many correspondents, local journalists and representatives of local organizations as well.

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The workshops were designed to empower NGO representatives with skills and techniques to increase their visibility and establish long-lasting cooperation with the journalists. At the same time, journalists gained an opportunity to learn more about investigative journalism and about the benefits of working with NGOs as partners.

Both journalists and CSOs have responded more than positively to the efforts for cooperation and have emphasized the benefits of the joint activities so far. As result of their involvement dozen of articles were published in the media.

- Calls for investigative stories

With the calls for investigative stories in total 21 journalists were supported in 2014. They were all beneficiaries of this award which is consisted of financial and editorial support for their investigations and they were all working on investigations in the framework of the predetermined issues of common interest.

The following were the most popular stories published within the calls for investigative awards, excluding the ones published in the third quarter: "Skopje pollution – Crime without criminals", "Discrimination – A stamp for returning Macedonian Roma citizens", "Land lots sold – hotels still not built", "Macedonia torn between the cross and the crescent moon". They have all influenced the public on different ways.

For illustration, the story "Skopje pollution – Crime without criminals" sparked numerous follow-ups in other media and inspired many people to take part in the peaceful protests in front of the biggest polluter in Skopje – the steel complex Zelezarnica, while the story "Land lots sold – hotels still not built" provoked reaction from the Ministry of Transport and Communications, but they have refrained from further communication after the author of the story replayed to their reaction.

The story "Macedonia torn between the cross and the crescent moon" was widely republished in Macedonia and in the region.

- Strengthening the Skills of the Macedonia Journalists:

Five participants from Macedonia were supported to attend the BIRN Summer School for Investigative Reporting.

Their stories will be published on the regional web page Balkan Insight in English and on Prizma.mk in Macedonian.

Two stories were published this year from participants at the Summer School from 2013. First one "Illegal Logging is Destroying Ancient Forests in the Balkans" was published in May as regional investigation for the illegal logging on the Balkans. Co-authors of this regional story from Macedonia are journalists Kristina Ozimec and Gabriela Delova. Among the many

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regional republications, this investigation was republished and by Global post, America's world news site.

The second story published from the participants at the Summer School in 2013 was "Skopje Landfill Tender Winner: No Experience, No Investment" and it provoked quite a lot of controversy as the Italian company in question threatened to sue. We briefly pulled off the story to give the company time to flag any possible inaccuracies. Since they failed to do so, it became clear that the threat was merely an attempt to block the story from reaching the public. As a result we republished the story several days later, along with all the communication between BIRN and the Italian company, which in turn resulted in much more readers of the story and numerous republications.

- Media Coverage Research:

In 2013 a comprehensive monitoring and analysis was made by the Center for Civil Communication on how media are reporting on the issues of common interest which were already determined by the project. The monitoring was officially published in Macedonian, Albanian and English in the first quarter of 2014 when it was widely disseminated to more than 100 relevant stakeholders, mostly to the media, civil society organizations.

The results from the monitoring were presented at the workshops as well so the journalists and CSO's can see what the current situation is and how it can be improved.

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

The Project for Investigative Journalism and Cooperation between Media and Civil Society in partnership with KOD, TV investigative program, produced and aired in total 7 shows in 2014 on issues of common interest. Many issues were raised in the public with these shows like quality of life, environmental problems, educational and health issues and reached directly to the wider audience in the country that might have limited access to the news served online.

During the production of these shows it was noticed that the CSO's have become more responsive to the media and willing to talk and discuss about the problems in the fields in which they have expertise. All of these shows were made in cooperation with CSO's from different fields like: Green Power, Vila Zora, Eko Svest, Front, Reaktor, Helsinki Committee, HERA, HOPS, Coalition for Sexual and Health Rights of the Marginalized Communities in Macedonia, Doverba and many others.

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