

# **INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN THE BULGARIAN PRESS: THE IMPACT OF POLITICIZATION AND THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALISM**

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## Abstract

I investigate the political influence in international news and the level of professionalism in the Bulgarian press twenty years after the fall of communism. The quality of the newspapers is examined by content analysis that is based on a survey and interviews conducted with the chief editors of the international sections of each newspaper. I demonstrate that the mixture of old and new standards, practices and values undermines professionalism in today's press. My conclusions are that press is still politicized; journalistic professionalism is still in the developing phase; a clear distinction between serious and tabloid press is still missing; and freedom of the press is suppressed by unclear sources of the media capital. Political parties exercise influence over the newspapers through their business interests. Thus, media in the transition countries has to develop further and to struggle for its complete and truly liberation.

# INTRODUCTION

Freedom of the media is a sign for democracy in every society and country. During communist period media and journalists were restrained. They were obedient followers of the state agenda that was dictated by the communist party and political leaders. Therefore, after the fall of the communism development of democracy in the post communist countries can be seen in terms of freedom of the media.

Attempts were made western practices to be applied or adopted in the transition countries. However, the western models did not succeed because they were neither rightly transmitted to the East-Europe countries, nor they were suitable to the post-communist transitions. What really happened was that practices that tamed press under the communism were quickly transformed in new market mechanisms. The weaknesses of the democratic transition were the absent market regulations, the lack of legal and institutional protection of journalists, low professionalism of the journalists, missing ethic regulations in the media. As a consequence of the mixture of old and new practices media was controlled by political parties, oligarchic or monopoly structures. All this resulted into politicized media with almost no independence of journalists. Moreover, media was used “as tools to intervene in the political world”, (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 113).

Bulgaria is a typical example for a communist country and its transition period after 1989 had the listed above features. The specific effects of the Bulgarian transition on the press mostly concerned the ownership which fell under political and/or economic dependence, monopoly (mainly foreign) and unclear funding.

This thesis focuses on the examination and analysis of the Bulgarian press. There are studies that examine the processes and the major tendencies in the Bulgarian media landscape from the early 90s until 2004-2005. However, none of them examines in deep the politicization of the Bulgarian press. Additionally, the studies draw general conclusions about the press, do not make any difference between domestic and international content or address mainly the domestic news.

The thesis aims to assess the current level of independence of the press by analyzing whether and to what extent the communist and post-communist attitudes are overcome in Bulgaria. I investigate the development of the press after the major political changes in 1989, to what extent press is free from political influence and what is the level of professionalism in the press. The political influence may be considered simultaneously as external and internal factor that changes the media. It is external because in the post-communist countries the state postponed the establishment of proper legal and institutional environment in order to ensure the development under democracy. It is internal because media had also responsibility to decide what part to play in this process. Media could incite public debates and refuse to be part of political and business interests or media could choose to play a passive role of an agenda follower. On the other hand, professionalism should be a self-generating item and its development depends mainly on the journalistic community. Therefore, by the evaluation of the professionalism in the press it is possible to trace the independent steps that journalists made towards democratization and the freedom of speech.

Examination of the content of international news (especially in the Bulgarian press) is a theme that is slightly touched by any scholar. It is interesting to see what happens in the international sections: whether the political influence is the same, stronger or weaker compared to the domestic topics.

The monitoring period is two months thus the findings of the thesis are based of a snapshot picture of the Bulgarian press. The observed newspapers represent a cross section of the most read papers.

I show that media content is still modeled by both political parties and business, which exercise influence over the press. Each of the five major newspapers demonstrates support to political parties in Bulgaria, either directly or indirectly. Along with this tendency, professionalism is still questionable.

First, I give theoretical framing of the topic by describing the features of the media under the communism and its consequences and how they are connected to the Bulgarian transition. Additionally, I highlight the basic characteristics of the quality press. The latter is related to the methodology of the survey that is described in the second chapter. The third section presents the profiles of each newspaper that are further analyzed. The fourth part analyzes the findings of the survey and makes conclusions about the presence of political influence in the dailies and the professionalism of the journalists.

## CHAPTER 1: THEORETHICAL FRAMING

This chapter presents the broad picture of the emergence and the progress of the press in the post-communist countries. The first part describes how the media worked under communism and highlights the main consequences of this period. The second section examines the main tendencies in the Bulgarian press after the fall of communism. Thus, it is possible to see the development of the press up to the present and how it corresponds to the world journalistic standards. The final section observes the idea of the quality press and it also gives the theoretical framework of the methodology that is used for the further analysis.

### ***1.1. The Media under the Communism and Its Consequences***

Before tracing the process of development of media after 1989, I will outline the main functions and objectives of the journalism under the communism. By giving the picture of this period it is possible to see the origin of the main current problems in the post-communist countries and make a basic comparison to what extent the old journalistic practices have been replaced by the new tendencies inspired by democracy and market principles.

It is generally accepted that under the communism there was no freedom of speech and the media was used for party's propaganda and ideology. Michael Kunczik comments that "communism and press freedom is like fire and water; they cannot co-exist" (2001, 65). Epp Lauk additionally notes that under the communism "loyalty to the communist authorities was more important than professional skills and knowledge" (2008, 197) and "the facts were interpreted in accordance with Party directives and very often, interpretations were offered as information" (2008, 199). For a period of fifty years the press was completely managed by politicians and the state. The media strictly followed the party line and this led to tight



collaboration between journalists and political leaders. Indeed, the system itself made them mutually dependent: politicians needed the journalists to proclaim the party's propaganda and journalists were pleased with the privileges that were given by authority. Thus, as Lauk rightly points out "it was not so easy for journalists to give up their old practices and norms or to adopt them to the new communication entertainment" (2008, 198).

This is the starting point of the development of the new period of the journalism in every transition country. After the collapse of the communism, democracy was established in most of the post-communist countries and media was no more exclusively state owned. However, the realities in these countries are completely different from western democratic traditions. As Kunczik (2001, 68) argues in the latter the state actively promotes freedom, while in the Eastern countries the state merely allows it. Western democratic practices were distorted and twisted in the transition countries because as Lauk points out "western values were neither applicable nor adaptable to the existing cultural context" (2008, 196).

Eight specific factors in the transition countries explain why the western concepts are misleadingly twisted. First, neither politicians, nor journalists wanted to meet all the changes democracy required. Politicians and journalists were not willing to give up their mutual dependence; neither of them wanted to give up the additional advantages they were used to. In this respect Emmy Barouh doubts that "journalists really want their freedom" (2001, 109).

Secondly, journalists were not very familiar with democratic policies and especially how to deal with them. As Lauk points out, the reasons for the failure of establishment of the fact-based journalism are the low professional standards: "lack of reporting skills, various external pressures on journalists and editors, close connections with political or/and economic structures" (2008, 200).

Third, as Barbara Trionfi argues “laws are widely used to suppress information and opinions” (2001, 94). Bajomi-Lazar complements this factor arguing that “the lack of any democratic tradition means that the new laws and institutions are used to tame journalists rather than to safeguard their freedom” (2001, 9). This is linked to the fourth factor, which Trionfi classifies as the remaining of the “old, communist-style practices” as well as the leaders of the old system continued to be in power maintaining “the same attitudes towards the media, asking journalists to perform ideological and educational tasks” (2001, 95).

Fifth, after 1989 the free market was used for economic leverage to control the media (Bajomi-Lazar 2001). As well, the economic pressure in the media is combined with unclear ownership that is extremely rarely declared and it very often conceals political interests that are hidden behind the blurred figure of the owner. The owner of the media is considered as a key factor that is “committed to his own economic and political interests than to authentic information” (2001, 9). This is rightly called by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi captured media that “trade influence and manipulate information rather than to inform the public” (2008, 91).

It is paradoxical that media freedom is additionally violated by the oligarchic structures that emerged in the free market and economic dependence of the media, which is considered as threat to freedom of the press, as Kunczik (2001, 69) notes. It follows from this that free market sets limitations on the freedom of the media in transition countries because regulations are absent. During the transition period the result for the media is the misleading combination of “new and old values and beliefs – one that embraces a new multi-party political system, and another that still claims the right to control communication channels” and all this process is characterized by “a reminiscence of past” (Perusko and Popovic 2008, 171).

Sixth, as Bajomi-Lazar (2008, 79) argues that institutions that protect the media were not established. Barouh adds the seventh factor: journalists were separated into major categories:

“players with a track record and players without track record” (2001, 108) and this also fails the democratic processes, because the journalists with track record worked hard to make the old practices to remain. This feature leads to the eighth factor, which is the missing consensus among the journalists about the proper role of the media and press (Bajomi-Lazar 2001, 9).

All these eight negative factors suppress the freedom of the media. Political and economic pressure is widely used in the press in the transition countries. Under such conditions the media itself cannot achieve significant changes especially in the quality of its production. This is the general picture of the post-communist countries. The next section presents the specific features of the Bulgarian transition.

## **1.2. *The Bulgarian Transition***

Since 1989, the major change of the democratic regime is the transition from command to market economy in the post-communist countries like Bulgaria. The transition also had a great impact on the press landscape and Orlin Spassov (2004) and Vessela Tabakova (n. d.) have captured accurately its main characteristics. First, the media generally changed its mode from serving the propaganda of the communist party to an agenda setter of the democratic society (2004, 50). Second, the print media shifted from state to private ownership and thus it was the first that responded to the new economic realities of competition and liberalization (Spassov 2004, 50; Tabakova n.d.; Mungiu-Pippidi 2008, 94). As a consequence of this, the Bulgarian public was overwhelmed by many newspapers and magazines that rapidly emerged in the early 90s.

Spassov (2004, 51) and Tabakova rightly argue that the boom in the media sector was combined with almost no regulation. As Spassov points out, the main negative characteristics were no fair competition and absence of ethical parameters. Freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Bulgarian constitution in three articles – 39, 40 and 41. However, the law

sets limitations on this right, adding that freedom of expression “shall not be exercised to the detriment of the rights and reputation of others, or to the detriment of national security, public order, public health and morality” (Article 41) and “a confiscation of printed matter (...) shall be allowed only through an act of the judicial authorities (...) in the case of the incitement of violence against anyone” (Article 40). These conditions set many loopholes in the law for infringing the freedom of expression.

In addition to the law there are Codes of Ethics and Press Council in Bulgaria. However, the Press Council is an artificial structure because it does not apply the Code of Ethics. Lauk rightly argues that “by itself, the code cannot influence the quality of reporting or prevent violations of ethical norms” (2008, 203). Thus, as he highlights (2008, 204) free speech and especially the freedom of the press are not guaranteed either by the legislation, not by the regulatory bodies.

Though officially the press no longer followed the party line after 1989, the dailies that surmounted the severe market competition were the ones that were supported by political parties. These were the dailies *Duma* and *Demokratiya*. These newspapers were the tribune of the left-oriented Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the right oriented Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) (Spasov 2004, 51), i.e. the two major parties. Therefore, in the first decade of the democratic period, the press was repressed by the domination of the strong political broadsheets. As Spasov (2004) and Tabakova (n. d.) argue this period is characterized by high level of politicization of the Bulgarian press. However, the political dailies were openly dependent on the political parties, and this should be considered as a positive feature, because people were not held under the illusion that they were reading politically neutral press. Thus, the survival of the political press was also supported by the public because instead of choosing to buy a politically neutral paper, people were buying the party line dailies.

Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) argue that there are two major approaches by which pluralism can be offered in democracy. The first, internal pluralism (the Anglo-Saxon model) means that within one paper all major political views are covered and thus it is neutral. In the second type, external pluralism (the Mediterranean model) each paper presents separate political view, i.e. different dailies are directly supported by different political parties. Thus, within several newspapers any citizen can approach many views and form an opinion. The latter corresponds with Bulgarian media landscape in the transition period. Consequently, Bulgarian dailies in the first decade after 1989 can be described as “papers that offers orientation rather than just news facts” (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 101). According to this model parties establish their own newspapers. The link between the high circulation and popularity of the newspaper with the positions of the party in the government is very strong (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 94). Thus, the rise and fall of the circulation and popularity of the Bulgarian political papers coincided with the victories and failures of the right and left parties in the elections. According to Velislava Popova (2004, 106/7) the strong relation between the power of the party’s money combined with political deviations of the dailies is additional evidence for the politicization of the press. Not surprisingly, in 2001 when a third party - the National Movement Simeon II (NMSII) came in power, the party line broadsheets were in crisis because they lost power in parliament.

Popova (2004, 107) like other scholars (Tabakova n.d.; Spassov, 2004) argues that the collapse of daily *Demokratiya* in 2002 singed the end of the period of the party press. Nonetheless, *Duma* disappeared twice, it was revived and nowadays it is in the market. Therefore, there are still dailies that openly declare their attachment to political parties. However, the prevailing part of the press does not openly declare its political sympathies, thus press unofficially attaches to political parties. In this respect the media landscape became even worse. As Popova (2004, 94), the ownership issue was the main concern that

undermined the transparency of the tenure because sources of the media capital were unclear. Consequently, she (2004, 95) rightly points out after 1989 there was only a shift from the state monopoly media to the press dependent on political and economic power and the “domination of several private media groups” (2004, 94). This tendency can be viewed as a complicated and wrong mixture between socialist and capitalist features (old and news practices) in the Bulgarian press (Lauk 2008, 209; Trionfi 2001, 94; Perusko and Popovic 2008, 169).

In 1996, the emergence of the German media group Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (WAZ) marks another period, which symbolizes the media ownership concentration in the Bulgarian press (Popova 2004, 108; Tabakova n. d.). In 1997 WAZ possessed and controlled 41.7% of the press market (Popova 2004; Tabakova n. d.) by owning the dailies *Trud* and *24 Chasa* and the weekly *168 Chasa*. As Winfried Schulz states “media must neither be owned by the state, nor by political parties or banks and business groups” (2001, 53). Zrinjka Perusko and Helena Popovic also consider this tendency as dangerous because it “leads to diminished diversity of media content (...) in cultural as well as social and political terms” (2008, 165). In correspondence to this threat, legal procedures were activated in order to protect the freedom of speech and fair competition. However, Tabakova argues that “after a series of ownership transfers” (n. d.) WAZ remained a market leader. Therefore, the monopoly of WAZ conforms to Lauk’s argument that foreign investments in post-communist countries did not support media; on the contrary “their pursuit of profit has fostered commercialization and homogenization of the contents and markets” (2008, 209).

WAZ also brought the hybridization of the press: this is the mixture of serious and tabloid content with a “tendency towards sensationalism and personalization” (Spasov 2004, 58). According to Spasov politicization and tabloidization failed the attempts to establish quality press in Bulgaria and press “is situated midway between the interests of the power bloc and the interests of the general public” (2004, 57). In contrast, Tabakova argues that the failure of

establishment of quality press led to the emergence of the hybrid newspapers, i.e. the public did not have interest in quality broadsheets. As a consequence the causality cannot be seen: press failed to offer valuable publications; or public had no interest in quality press, thus they disappeared.

The overall achievements of the Bulgarian journalism after 1989 are the fundamental change of the media from state to private ownership; political actors were demythologized and the “groundwork of public dialogue” was laid (Barouh 2001, 109). The problems are considered as “news in an entertaining format, mixing editorial content with advertising, sensational reporting, and scandal-mongering, found its way into everyday journalistic practices” (Lauk 2008, 198); failure “to set the agenda of public debate” (Barouh 2001, 107); facts mixed with comments or “information is either interpreted or placed in a context that contaminates facts” (Barouh 2001, 109); the concentration of the media ownership and almost zero transparency of the ownership.

### **1.3. 1. 3. The Basic Characteristics of the Quality Press**

Neutrality and objectivity in journalism are interpreted as distance from the events addressed (Kunczik 2001, 76). The issues of truthfulness and authenticity are out of the scope of this thesis. This is a slippery slope that involves the philosophic questions of what is really true and what should be deemed as truth. This thesis does not aim to validate whether the published information is truthful. As the scholars (Meyer and Lund n. d., 2; Kenneson 1995) argue there is no absolute truth because of the subjective human nature. Thus, more important in the journalistic articles is the “the radical separation of facts and values” (Meyer and Lund n. d., 2). Schulz (2001, 50), Hallin and Mancini (2004, 105) also underline the significance of this major distinction.

Framing the news is technique of putting additional value on some facts or diminishing the importance of other information. Scott London (1993) distinguishes between episodic and thematic framing: "episodic framing depicts concrete events that illustrate issues, while thematic framing presents collective or general evidence." By tracing the story of some events (their development over time) the media gives the full picture of it, the cause and solutions can be viewed, and society feels more responsible for it. On the other hand, by reading about "unrelated events" (London 1993) the public cannot see the link between the cause and the consequence. Moreover, episodic framing makes impossible formation of public opinion about a particular issue.

Bajomi-Lazar defines the free media in the post-communist countries as "lack of censorship and the plurality of accessible sources of information" (2008, 77). Schulz complements him arguing that resources, legal and political order, and professional standards are the primary conditions of open society and the criteria for the basic democratic values that lay the foundations of the quality journalism are independence, diversity and objectivity (2001, 47/49). The legal and political order guarantees the freedom and protection of the journalists. The diversity of resource opens up the possibilities of action to journalists – the more available resources there are, the more freedom and objectivity there is. Moreover, Kunczik (2001, 79) argues that journalists are dependent on their source and this is the price they pay.

Schulz (2001, 49) differentiates the *independence from* state, advertisers, pressure groups, owners of the media; and *independence for* advocacy and for a watchdog role. Schulz (2001, 49) also divides diversity into two major categories: *diversity of content and diversity of access*. *Diversity of content*, understood as plurality, encompasses the coverage of different topics, issues, geographic regions, persons and groups and particularly opinions, i.e. "the forum function of the mass media". *Diversity of access* means equal (each group/party has



equal amount of space and time in the media) and proportional access (“the attention is allocated according to the importance or size of different groups”).

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

For a period of two months (1.02.2010 – 31.03.2010) I observed the content of the international articles of five major newspapers in Bulgaria – *Duma*, *Standart*, *24 Hours*, *Monitor*, *Dnevnik*. I used the internet version of these newspapers, because they are easier accessible than the hard copies. In this period every day I read and analyzed three articles in each of these newspapers. Thus the major tendencies and sympathies of the newspapers are determined. The research framework is based on eight categories that I track in this chapter. The categories assess the quality of the dailies by emphasizing on quantitative and qualitative features that each examined article has. The comparative content analysis is made on the basis of this methodology.

### 2.1 *Type*

*Type* mainly distinguishes news without explicit commentary from news with explicit commentary, i.e. the mixture of facts and comments. *Type* consists of four sub-groups:

- 1) *News* - contain reports and synopsis. It is possible to see the proportion of the uninfluenced information by any commentary, i.e. how much freedom is given to readers to evaluate the international events on their own.
- 2) *Interview* – it is difficult to detect the amount of journalistic or political interference in this genre, thus it is separated.
- 3) *Commentary* and *Analysis* present the journalistic evaluation of a particular international issue.

4) *Official Statement* indicates government or political officials' public speeches that are directly transmitted by the journalists as news. This is the news with explicit commentary and it is highly politically influenced.

## **2.2 Framing**

The second feature, ***framing***, observes whether the item is *thematic* or *episodic*. The *thematic framing* examines whether the newspapers follow the development of some events and stories or they just chaotically report news, i.e. *episodic framing*. The ***framing*** determines to what extent the news is positioned in a context (Scott London) as well as the in-debt debate and the analytical prospects of the newspapers that is considered by Orlin Spassov (2004, 9) as basic characteristic of the quality press.

## **2.3 Size**

***Size*** determines whether an article is: 1) large (more than 15 lines); 2) middle (10-15 lines); or 3) small (less than 10 lines). From the size of the publication it is possible to see the level of importance that the newspaper gives to particular topic, because it matters whether one topic is reported in five lines and if it is reported in several paragraphs. This is another way of measuring the level of importance that each newspaper puts in some topics and disregards others.

## **2.4 Position**

In this respect, ***position*** of the article serves as the same purpose. On its web page each newspaper locates one leading article that appears with big picture and title; under the central news it highlights the next important items; and at the bottom of the page are the least significant articles. Depending how the news is positioned - 1) leading; 2) secondary; or 3) in

third place, the reader is guided to what extent the article itself is important (of course the importance is determined by the newspaper).

## **2.5 Theme**

**Theme** refers to the content and it shows the thematic focus of the dailies which classifies each daily as tabloid or quality press. The sub-divisions are: 1) Politics; 2) Disaster/catastrophe; 3) Economics; 4) EU policies and regulations; 5) Military; 6) Criminal; 7) International policies; 8) Environmental issues; 9) Popular entertainment; 10) Education; 11) Arts and culture.

All of the thematic labels are easily understood except for *international policies*. It stands for news, which concern problems within a particular country, i.e. the particular matter does not cross the border. An example for this sub-category is the health care reform in the USA. Thus, it distinguishes the pure foreign news from the news that concern to some extent domestic (Bulgarian) issues.

## **2.6 Coverage of Regions and Countries**

This section locates the news on the political map of the world and it measures the amount of news and publications that concern particular country. The sub-sections are:

- 1) *Europe* is taken as geographical notion, not only the EU understanding.
- 2) *USA*
- 3) *Russia*
- 4) *The Middle East*
- 5) *The Balkans* separates the neighboring countries of Bulgaria from the rest of Europe
- 6) *Bulgaria* contains news that crosses the borders of this country and appears on the international scene.

## 7) *The rest of the world* – Asia, Latin America, Africa

### **2.7 Political Opinions**

The presence of *political opinions* examines the political deviation in the newspapers. The sub-categories are: 1) no; 2) yes –left; 3) yes – right; 4) central. Political opinions are difficult to be captured. Therefore, I report only the extreme cases. For example, a critique of the democratic policies is considered as a left political support; presenting only the view of the right party is considered as support of the right. A political opinion is classified as central when a newspaper supports the current government, which is central. The limits of this category are that not all politically influenced news can be captured and some of the reported items may not really represent political deviation.

### **2.8 Sources**

*Sources* show the range of the information channels papers use. More sources, the higher the level of objectivity of the daily. Here is made a major difference between the Russian and the Western sources, because they present mainly two divergent perspectives and views. The latter also symbolizes the separation between the left and right political gravitation of the papers and it is a continuation of the political agenda that each newspaper follows. The sub-sections are:

- 1) Un-sourced - articles with no citation.
- 2) Western sources – Western agencies and newspapers.
- 3) Russian sources – ITAR-TASS; other Russian agencies; and newspapers.
- 4) Direct reports – reports and data used directly by the dailies.
- 5) Bulgarian sources – usage of Bulgarian agencies or correspondents.

6) Other sources - newspapers that are from a foreign country, which is a subject of an article,  
– for example Greece, South Korea – and these sources are considered as additional channels  
of information.

## **CHAPTER 3: PROFILES OF THE NEWSPAPERS**

The following profiles of the newspapers give the basic framework of each daily. The parameters that are used to describe the papers are their ownership; political orientation; and type – elite, tabloid or hybrid.

### **3.1 *Duma***

The daily was launched in 1990 as continuation of the party press of the communist period. *Duma* twice disappeared from the market: in 1998 and in 2001. Despite all the difficulties, the daily managed to overcome its financial problems. Today *Duma*'s publisher is Nikolai Malinov (newspaper Struma 2010). At present *Duma* is openly attached to the left-oriented Bulgarian Socialist Party.

### **3.2 *Dnevnik***

*Dnevnik* was established in 2001 (Popova 2004, 112). It belongs to *Economedia*, a shareholder association divided between Ivo Prokopiev and Philip Harmadjiev. More importantly, the owners are not associated with any shadow business structures or accused in any crimes. *Dnevnik* is defined as an elitist, business-orientated and quality newspaper (Popova 2004, 112; Spassov 2004, 62). Since 2002 *Dnevnik* has been co-published with the German media group Georg von Holtzbrinck, the publisher of Handelsblatt (Popova 2004, 112).

### 3.3 **24 Chasa**

*24 Chasa* was founded in 1990 by Petyo Blaskov and published by the press group *168 Chasa* (Iankov 2001, 14). In 1996 Blaskov sold the daily to the German media group Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (WAZ) (Iankov 2001, 21). Over the time *24 Chasa* changed several times its agenda from the right to the left and vice versa (Iankov 2001). Thus, it is difficult to be situated on the political continuum. Today the paper is characterized as hybrid one approaching wide variety of readers (Spasov 2004).

### 3.4 **Standart**

*Standart* was launched in 1992 and was published by “Standart News AG” (Standart News). The official owner is the lawyer Todor Batkov. In 2000 the Russian businessman Michael Corni bought the newspaper (Popova 2004, 110). As a result *Standart* politically deviated to the right. In the end of 2000 a scandal erupted that Corni’s firm was financing foundation “Demokratiya”, which belonged to party Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB). Shortly after this, “Corni was expelled from Bulgaria after having been designed as posing a threat to national security” (Popova 2004, 110). However, Corni still has “his stake in the Standart daily” (Popova 2004, 111).

### 3.5 **Monitor**

*Monitor* was established in 1998 by Petyo Blaskov, who was simultaneously an owner and an editor in chief. The ownership of *Monitor* was transferred several times including offshore companies which made the tenure nontransparent (Popova 2004, 111/112). In 2007 Blaskov sold *Monitor* to “New Bulgarian Media Group”, which is owned by Irena Krasteva, who is



considered as Dogan's business lady<sup>1</sup> (Velikova 2009). Her son Delyan Peevski, who is MRF MP and former deputy-minister of the same quota, unofficially controls the paper. Despite their scandalous image they slowly become into media tycoons. "New Bulgarian Media Group" is the only one that is not a member of the Bulgarian Press Council.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmed Dogan is the leader of the Turkish party Movement for Rights and Freedom (MRF)

## CHAPTER 4: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE NEWSPAPERS

The profiles of each newspaper in the previous chapter can be related to the current comparative study of the examined newspapers. The first section analyzes the news publishing process in the editorials teams. The second analyzes the scope of the international news based on the coverage of regions and countries and the content analysis of the articles. The third draws conclusions about the political and ownership deviations in the newspapers.

### 4.1 The International News Publishing Process

The criteria for analysis are: the number of edits each article has; the number of editors that work in the editorials' offices; the languages editors use; the newspapers' subscriptions in comparison to the sources that each daily uses.

*Table 1. The Publishing Process*

Newspaper	Number of editors	Number of edits	Languages	Subscription
<b>Standart</b>	7	3	English,Russian, German,French	Reuters, Associated press
<b>Duma</b>	4	2	English,Russian, German,French	Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (BTA)
<b>Monitor</b>	4	1	All languages except Arabic	No subscription
<b>24 Chasa</b>	8	3	English,Russian, German,French	Associated Press, France Press
<b>Dnevnik</b>	6	2/3	English,German, French	Reuters, Associated Press

As can be seen in Table 1 *Standart*, *24 Chasa* and *Dnevnik* have subscriptions to big agencies like Reuters, Associated Press and France Press. These should be considered as the initial point from which the editors start to develop the international stories. The fact that the dailies use identical channels should mean that they offer similar information. However, these dailies present different perspectives of international news. Thus, the subscriptions play a small role to the international news formation. Subscription is not so important because all agencies have sections that can be used for free and the details of any news can be found in other sources, the information itself is available through internet. Additionally, it may be considered as a negative feature for a newspaper to have a subscription to a particular agency because the editors' interest falls mainly on a particular agency and omits to look at additional sources. Thus, the concentration on two big agencies limits the whole perspective of the range of international sources.

The subscription and the languages used in the editorial teams should be analyzed together with the sources editors refer to because both of them give the picture of the publishing process. Table 2 demonstrates the general problem of missing citations of sources. This feature speaks for unprofessionalism. Another common feature is the gravitation to Western sources, which are a half of the overall sources, and diminished proportion of Russian sources. This could be interpreted as a consequence of the major shift of the Bulgarian international affairs towards the west after the fall of communism. However, the variations between the figures in the Russian citations differ from daily to daily.

Table 2.Sources

Sources/Newspaper	Standart	Duma	Monitor	24 Chasa	Dnevnik
Unsourced	8%	23%	20%	28%	36%
Western sources	48%	48%	48%	46%	40%
Russian sources	9%	17%	17%	7%	1%
Direct reports	0%	1%	2%	1%	8%
Bulgarian sources	26%	1%	3%	10%	8%
Other sources	9%	10%	10%	8%	5%

A positive feature is that *Monitor* and *Duma* approach information with the widest coverage. The difference is that *Monitor* has no subscription to any agency but the editors know almost all languages, thus, information is easily available to them. This is crucially important because in the international editorial teams the access to any source is ensured by the languages editors know. Thus, the most professional publishing process according to this feature is conducted by *Monitor*.

The access (Kunczik 2001, 79) and diversity of sources (Bajomi-Lazar 2008, 77) are considered to be the basics of the journalistic independence, objectivity and quality of publications. In comparison, the chief editor of the international news of *Standart* Vladislav Punchev states that when the editors do not know a language (for instance Spanish or Greek<sup>2</sup>) they use Google translator. Consequently, the knowledge of the basic languages is not sufficient for an international editorial team. This fact stands for low professional standards in the papers. As Lauk (2008, 198) defines low professional standards are some of the reasons for failure of establishment of quality journalism in the post communist countries.

<sup>2</sup> For example, knowing Greek is important for the international editors because Greece is a neighbor country of Bulgaria and journalists refer to Greek sources very often (especially during the financial crisis and the strikes in Greece).

Both *Monitor* and *Duma* have the greatest percentages of Russian sources used. This fact could be interpreted as gravitation to the left political continuum. *Duma* is the only daily that has subscription to the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (BTA)<sup>3</sup>. The rest of the newspapers also use it, but none of them is subscribed to it. Thus, this demonstrates gravitation towards the state agenda, i.e. highlighting the international news that the government defines as the most important.

*Standart* has the smallest percentage of un-sourced articles and together with wide variety of sources distinguishes as a good example of professionalism and quality publications. To some extent *24 Chasa* fits into *Standart's* description. However, *24 Chasa* negatively distinguishes with greater percentages of unsourced articles. Thus, *24 Chasa* should be posited one level down.

*Dnevnik* represents an extreme case by having no Russian speaking editor. Consequently, this seriously limits the access to all Russian sources and it is also a result of the newspaper's policy not to publish any articles concerning Russian matters. The fact that there is no Russian speaking editor also means that the daily limits its sources only to Anglo-Saxons. As a consequence the articles present mainly Western point of view. The editors consider any news from Russian sources as subjectively biased by the Russian political agenda and the left party line, so they avoid the Russian sources. However, omitting whole country especially when it is a great power is not an effective way of overcoming the problem of politically deviated news.

It can be concluded that the distribution of sources is in alliance with the focus of the international news that each daily has and the subscription to an international agency is not crucial for the quality of the news. More important is the knowledge of wide variety of

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<sup>3</sup> BTA is the Bulgarian state news agency

languages because this is the primary condition to access to information. On this basis *Monitor* offers the best quality and *Dnevnik* the worst. *Standart*, *Duma* and *24 Chasa* are in the middle of this scale.

The other two features of Table 1 are the number of editors that work in the international editorial offices and the number of edits each articles has. There is a relation between these two elements; moreover, they exist in the context of the hierarchy that each paper has. It can be seen from Table 1 that more editors each paper has, the more edits each article has.

Two assumptions could be made about this relation in relevance to the quality of the news published. The first is that big international teams and more edits indicate higher professionalism and good quality of the news. The second assumption is that small international team and less edits indicate more operational efficiency and less censorship. Based on these assumptions, the five newspapers can be separated into two groups. The first group has more than two edits and more than four editors (*Standart*, *24 Chasa* and *Dnevnik*). This is the same group of newspapers that has subscription to the big agencies. The other group consists of *Duma* and *Monitor* that both have four editors in the international team and two or one edits of the articles. Although the first assumption could be perceived as more reasonable, for the Bulgarian press more effective and operational is the second. The arguments are as follows.

First, the extensive hierarchy makes the operational process difficult and it also signals for low level of professionalism. If an article needs more than one or two edits this means it is not well written, so professionalism is low. For example, the chief editor of the international news of *Monitor* Vecheslav Tunev states that his team is skilled enough and he considers the editing of the articles written by his colleagues as waste of time. He intervenes only by editing

titles by making them “catchy titles”. He notes that if he edits their articles this would mean that he does not trust them as professionals and he disregards their work.

Second, the strong hierarchy of the editors diminishes their freedom, i.e. leads to censorship. This does not mean that even if there is only one chief editor he could not completely change the whole content of an article, but when the editing process splits into more stages, this significantly increases the chance of censorship interference. Additionally, the complex hierarchy hampers the whole publishing process. A proof for this is that the productivity of the papers with bigger teams is the same as the dailies with small editorial teams. This is because journalistic’ and editors’ work become similar to complicated bureaucratic operations, because more time is spent on editing.

The further analysis shows that the international news of the first group of newspapers (*Standart*, *24 Chasa* and *Dnevnik*) is less qualitative than the second group (*Monitor*, *Duma*). Therefore, it can be concluded that a small team of international editors (up to four or five people) and not more than two edits of an article are the formula for quality news in the Bulgarian press. However, more important is the quality, not quantity of the editors. It is more reasonable each journalist to know one or two languages that the rest of the team do not know, so all editors can complement each other and cover wider variety of sources.

#### **4.2      *The Scope of the International News in Each Newspaper***

This section observes the most recent themes in the international articles, what regions and with what intensity the dailies cover them, and the editors’ criteria for news selection. I analyze how these features interact between each other and how they are related to the official dailies’ agendas. The latter answers the question whether there is a meeting point of the survey’s findings and the criteria for news selection stated by the editors and high professional standards of news publishing.

### 4.2.1 The Coverage of Regions and Countries

Table 3. The Coverage of Regions and Countries

Sources/Newspaper	Standart	Duma	Monitor	24 Chasa	Dnevnik
Europe	30%	38%	40%	32%	56%
USA	17%	15%	16%	20%	0%
Russia	8%	11%	11%	6%	0%
Middle East	4%	5%	11%	4%	1%
Balkans	21%	13%	11%	12%	10%
Bulgaria	8%	8%	1%	17%	28%
The rest of the world	12%	10%	10%	9%	5%

Table 3 presents the most significant variations of the newspapers' regional and country coverage. The findings of the survey from *the Middle East*, *the Balkans* and *the rest of the world* are broadly comparable. The data demonstrates that the dailies share more or less equal interest towards these regions. The only extremes are the extensive coverage of the Balkans in *Standart* and *Monitor's* wide coverage of the Middle East region. Compared to the rest of the dailies both of them report twice as much about these regions. These two deviations should be classified as specific features of both dailies that indicate for special emphasis of the editorial team to these regions. The further analysis highlights the major differences between the papers.



#### 4.2.1.1 Coverage of Europe

According to this criterion the newspapers can be divided again into groups. The first group consists of the extremes *Dnevnik*, which coverage of Europe is roughly twice as high as *Standart* (30%) and *24 Chasa* (32%), which have the smallest percentages. The second group is represented by *Duma* and *Monitor* and it embodies a balance of the Europe coverage. These two groups are the same as they were in the subscription and the editing process divisions.

The international section of *Dnevnik* is called *Europe*. Thus, the extensive coverage of Europe is unsurprising because it is due to the paper's policy. Karaboev (*Dnevnik*) explains that this policy is a reflection of the Bulgarian membership in the EU. Thus, the daily decided to follow every story that concerns this theme. It mostly reports about the EU institutions and regulations. However, the high concentration of one region undermines the paper's objective to be an elitist daily. Thus, the message in between the lines is that Europe and mainly the EU are the only regions abroad. Karaboev notes that the basic criterion for news selection is the EU topics and his words match the survey findings.

In contrast, *Standart* and *24 Chasa* report less about Europe in comparison to the other dailies. This is because they attempt to cover all world regions and again this is a reflection from the editorial's policy. The papers are characterized by Spassov (2004, 57) as hybrids: a mixture of tabloid and quality press. This definition is still valid, because the newspapers temp to cover the most popular, dramatic, important regions and states. Neither Punchev (*Standart*), nor the chief editor of the international news of *24 Chasa* Rosen Iankov ("24 Chasa") put in the criteria for news selection emphasis on Europe.

The chief editor of the international news of *Duma* Galina Mladenova classifies the European region as the second criterion for the news selection, and Tunev (*Monitor*) states that the leading priority is not a region, but the agencies' intensity of reporting an event. However, these two dailies both present considerable amount of news about Europe. Thus, dailies could be deemed as followers of the Bulgarian international agenda.

#### **4.2.1.2 Coverage of the USA and Russia**

Among the newspapers there are few variations in the coverage of the USA and Russia. *Dnevnik* is again the only extreme. Although these are great powers, the daily does not publish a single article that concerns them. Though that Karaboev states that the second criterion for news selection is topics that concern great powers that have major impact on Bulgaria, the daily disregards these two great powers. Thus, the editors try to ignore the left-right political fight. This may be considered as prevention from any political attempts for interventions in the editorial's policy in the future.

*Standart* and *24 Chasa* carry the balance of the coverage of Russia. But in comparison to their USA coverage the latter is twice as high. This feature may be considered as right deviation. As Spassov (2004, 60) points out in its foundation *Standart* was defined as a right paper and *24 Chasa* was considered as one of the first independent papers after 1989. Thus, the old perceptions still exist, i.e. deviation to the west.

Once more *Duma* and *Monitor* have the same indicators. In comparison to the rest of the dailies they have less coverage of the USA and the greatest coverage of Russia. This is another signal for gravitation towards the left. However, both of them cover more USA than Russia. This could be explained by the international agenda of Bulgaria, which is shifted towards the west.

#### 4.2.1.3 Coverage of Bulgaria

In the coverage of Bulgaria and the Balkans the previous groups split and each paper follows an independent policy. The general feature of the Bulgarian press to see the international news in the light of Bulgarian topics should be considered as extension of the domestic news. The only difference is that this news crosses the Bulgarian borders and the focus is mainly on how the Bulgarians present themselves in the world, how the foreigners see and perceive the Bulgarians. *Standart*, *Dnevnik* and *24 Chasa* are the representatives of this negative feature. Although *Duma* has equal percentage of coverage of the Bulgarian topics as *Standart* the perspective is different. For instance, *Duma* publishes only news that concerns Bulgarian foreign affairs instead of kidnapped Bulgarians abroad, which represents the *Standart* hybrid deviation.

*Dnevnik* has the highest figures because it most extensively concentrates on how the EU perceives Bulgaria and what are the consequences of the EU regulations and policies for both the Bulgarians abroad and at home. However, Karaboev does not highlight as a criterion the coverage of closely related topics to Bulgaria.

*Standart* emphasizes how the Bulgarian interests are related to the great powers. The daily has additional focus on the potential menaces that endanger the Bulgarians that are abroad and at home. *24 Chasa* gives tabloid form of international news, i.e. the yellow perspective. The daily mainly publishes news about crimes, accidents, sensational and personal stories that are caused by Bulgarians or happened to Bulgarians abroad. Thus, Spassov rightly defines this paper as hybrid, because it gravitates between serious and tabloid content.

*Monitor* and *Duma* present the most important news for the world, not the most important news from the Bulgarian perspective. By limiting the Bulgarian coverage to the minimum, *Monitor* publishes “pure” international news. This is a positive feature because *Monitor*

allows the public to read the pure international news instead of news that repeats domestic matters.

## 4.2.2 Content Analysis of the Newspapers

The content analysis is built on the categories of themes, types, titles, size and framing of the articles. The findings of each category are presented in Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

*Table 4. Themes in the Articles*

Theme/Newspaper	Standart	Duma	Monitor	24 Chasa	Dnevnik
<b>politics</b>	19%	30%	35%	13%	18%
<b>disaster/catastrophe</b>	17%	6%	8%	10%	2%
<b>economics</b>	8%	17%	3%	6%	14%
<b>EU policies and regulations</b>	4%	9%	3%	8%	40%
<b>military</b>	5%	11%	10%	5%	1%
<b>criminal</b>	18%	4%	9%	15%	1%
<b>International policies</b>	21%	17%	17%	14%	19%
<b>environmental issues</b>	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%
<b>popular entertainment</b>	6%	3%	11%	26%	1%
<b>education</b>	0%	1%	1%	1%	3%
<b>arts and culture</b>	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%

Publishing of serious and significant themes like politics; economics; EU policies and regulations; international policies; education; military; arts and culture is a good sign for a quality newspaper. On the other hand, the tabloid press is characterized by publishing popular disaster/catastrophe, entertainment and criminal news. Based on this division Table 5 shows

the overall percentages of the serious and tabloid content of each newspaper. This criterion classifies the five dailies into three groups. First, *Standart* and *24 Chasa* represent the hybrid tabloid format, as Spassov (2004) also notes. Second, *Duma* and *Monitor* can be categorized as quality press. Third, *Dnevnik* is the only paper that represents the profiled serious press because, as was seen earlier it focuses on the EU.

*Table 5. Serious vs. Tabloid Content*

Newspaper	Standart	Duma	Monitor	24 Chasa	Dnevnik
<b>Serious content</b>	59%	87%	72%	51%	96%
<b>Tabloid content</b>	41%	13%	28%	49%	4%

The newspapers can be arranged in the serious-tabloid continuum as follows: *Dnevnik*, *Duma*, *Monitor*, *Standart*, *24 Chasa*. There are some variations in these groups, because the dailies concentrate on different themes and other factors like size, type, titles of the articles and political views also matter.

*24 Chasa* has a stronger gravitation towards tabloidization than *Standart*. Almost all of the themes that *24 Chasa* publishes are seen in the light of the curious, scandalous and gossipy side. Even politics is presented in gossipy manner. On the other hand, *Standart* deviates from the first to the second group because its thematic focus is wider: it reports more extensively on international policies and less on popular entertainment. Furthermore, the quality of *Standart's* articles is better: the predominantly size of the articles is medium (see Table 8) compared to *24 Chasa* mainly small. This is meaningful because this shows that *Standart* publishes articles that contain more information and in this respect are more complete and higher quality while *24 Chasa's* articles contain a few lines.

In the second group the slight difference between *Duma* and *Monitor* comes from *Duma's* emphasis on economics and *Monitor's* focus on popular entertainment. Despite the latter *Monitor's* articles concern festivals, international customs and unusual events instead of gossip content like *24 Chasa*. In this respect *Monitor* differs from the first group. The figures of *Monitor* and *Duma* coincide in the categories: military, international policies and politics (with 5% difference).

Moreover, Tunev (*Monitor*) admits the presence of the tabloid content, while Iankov explains the tabloid format of *24 Chasa* with the physical form of the newspaper, although the rest of the Bulgarian dailies have the same size. This presents an ethical issue concerning the openly declaration of any media about how it defines itself and what role it aims to play in the society. This tendency is highlighted by Spassov (2004) and Tabakova (n. d.) as one of the characteristics of the press in the middle of the transition period. The mismatching item of the official statement of the editor with the factuality of the findings undermines the prestige of *24 Chasa*. This contradictory aspect appears once again when it comes to the sources: all the editors denied that there are un-sourced articles in their newspapers. This also stands for the ethical issue – press does not acknowledge its mistakes and this is an obstacle for the further development of the press in Bulgaria.

The third group that is solely represented by *Dnevnik* strictly avoids publishing of any tabloid content. It focuses on the EU issues, international policies, politics and economics. The international policies themes concern mostly EU countries, so together with the EU topics it can be concluded that roughly 60% of the themes are related to the EU matters. This speaks for highly profiled content of the newspaper and should be considered as a unique example of the Bulgarian press because none of the rest dailies has such a high percentage of serious themes. Thus, *Dnevnik* is classified as elitist paper. However, it is not enough for a daily to be described as an elitist just because of this factor. According to the other categories

*Dnevnik* has negative features: missing citation of sources, limited scope of sources, missing coverage of great powers like Russia and the USA and presence of political opinions in the articles combined with high percentage of presence of official statements (see Table 6). The latter means that in some of the articles the newspaper just translates the information omitting any journalistic interference. Consequently, the presence of non-tabloid content cannot compensate other elements that should be part of quality press.

*Table 6.Types of the Articles*

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>News</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Commentary and Analysis</b>	<b>Official Statement</b>
Standart	87 %	3%	3%	7%
Duma	67%	3%	15%	15%
Monitor	66%	1%	16%	17%
24 Chasa	75%	0%	12%	13%
Dnevnik	84%	0%	4%	12%

Table 6 demonstrates the common tendency in the Bulgarian press of publishing mainly news, meaning reports and synopsis, and official statements. By using these genres newspapers only transmit with slight interference information that comes from the sources. Commentary and analysis are small percentages of the international articles. This is extremely negative feature because the latter are representatives of the quality press. These are the genres through which journalists address important issues and express their analytical and critical attitude about any problems. The journalistic analysis is the most complicated genre that requires broader knowledge and understanding of the international events instead of solely translated information from sources. Analysis is the genre that forms opinions, positions and debates in the society that is why it is so powerful and important. The lack of commentary and analysis articles stands for weakness in the professionalism of the dailies.

However, the most politically influenced dailies *Duma* and *Monitor* (see Table 10) also have the highest percentages of analysis and commentary. This fact demonstrates that quality in the press goes hand in hand with the politicization. Another peculiar fact is that the hybrid *24 Chasa* also has a significant proportion of analysis. This confirms Spassov's (2004, 59) argument that there is no borderline between quality and tabloid press because they are embedded in one paper. According to the criterion of published types of articles both *Standart* and *Dnevnik* are the weakest position-makers.

It is alarming that the figures of *official statement* are equal to the *commentary and analysis* (for these features *Standart's* and *Dnevnik's* percentages are twice higher). By publishing public speeches of government or political officials' the press is directly used as a means of transmitting influential political views and opinions without any journalistic critical observation or thinking. Moreover, this news contains the highest percentage of political influence.

*Tables 7.Framing*

Newspaper	Standart	Duma	Monitor	24 Chasa	Dnevnik
<b>Thematic</b>	40%	38%	31%	29%	40%
<b>Episodic</b>	60%	62%	69%	71%	60%

As can be seen in Table 7 with some variations (*Monitor* and *24 Chasa* are the ones that mostly report episodically) there is a general tendency in the dailies to frame episodically. As London (1993) points out episodic framing fragments the whole process of reporting and makes hard for the reader to form an opinion about a particular event. Thus it is not posited in the public discourse. As a result it is difficult for the Bulgarian public to receive specific knowledge about international news unless an issue is systematically reported.



Table 8. Size of the Articles

<i>Newspaper</i>	<b>Large</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Small</b>
<b>Standart</b>	27%	47%	26%
<b>Duma</b>	58%	26%	16%
<b>Monitor</b>	46%	48%	6%
<b>24 Chasa</b>	24%	36%	40%
<b>Dnevnik</b>	33%	42%	25%

Table 8 shows that only one third of the articles of *Standart*, *24 Chasa* and *Dnevnik* are large. The worst of them is *24 Chasa*, which publishes the prevailing amount of small articles. *Duma* and *Monitor* represent better cases with half of their articles large-sized. However, the general tendency of mainly publishing small and medium sized articles supplements the latter conclusion about the episodic framing.

### 4.2.3 Political Deviations and Ownership Leverage

All the editors agree that political pressure and censorship are exercised mostly in the domestic news Karaboev (*Dnevnik*) even defines the domestic news as propaganda. In contrast, the five editors agree that it is more difficult international news to be influenced by political pressure or censorship. Although on the surface it seems that the owners and publishers are indifferent towards the content of the international news the following analysis demonstrates the contrary.

Table 9. News with Explicit Commentary vs. News without Explicit Commentary

Newspaper	Standart	Duma	Monitor	24 Chasa	Dnevnik
News with explicit commentary	87%	71%	77%	91%	69%
News without explicit commentary	13%	29%	23%	9%	31%

The figures from Table 9 show the perilous tendency of mixing facts with commentary that the authors (Schulz 2001, 50; Hallin and Mancini 2004, 105) agree that should be considered as intolerable and undermining the quality of the news. A disturbing fact is that one third of *Dnevnik* and *Duma's* articles contain *news with explicit commentary* (high percentages present also the rest of the papers). This seriously damages the professionalism.

The data from *political opinions* in Table 10 complements the concerns in the last paragraph. The higher is the percentage of news with explicit commentary, the more a particular daily politicized. As Schulz (2001, 49) argues media should allow proportional access to each party in order to ensure democracy and equality. The data shows that the press publishes politically biased news.

Table 10. Political Opinions

Newspaper	No	Left	Right	Central
<b>Standart</b>	98%	1%	1%	0%
<b>Duma</b>	71%	29%	0%	0%
<b>Monitor</b>	87%	8%	5%	0%
<b>24 Chasa</b>	92%	4%	3%	1%
<b>Dnevnik</b>	83%	2%	11%	4%

Table 10 shows that *Dnevnik* has a political gravitation towards the right and central. Unsurprisingly, *Duma*, as the official tribune of the left-oriented Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) has the greatest proportion of left political views. *Monitor* has both left and right deviations. Thus, the processes that flow in its editorial office are difficultly to be captured. The international sections of *Standart* and *24 Chasa* are least politically influenced. According to the politically influenced continuum the newspapers can be arranged as follows: *Duma*, *Dnevnik*, *Monitor*, *24 Chasa* and *Standart*<sup>4</sup>.

All of the above is a result from the overall control of the media and ownership pressure that is exercised. First, as the editors emphasize, the main problem in the Bulgarian press is the non-transparent ownership and unclear funding of the media. The non-transparent ownership that conceals political and business interests is also highlighted as a major problem by Kunczik (2001, 69) and Popova (2004, 94).

Second, as a consequence of the unclear ownership both political and business interests are served. Karaboev (*Dnevnik*) points out that the deviations in the Bulgarian newspapers depend on the “balance of power”, which are notions and contra notions of business. Tunev (*Monitor*) complements Karaboev by declaring that economic associations and lobbyism are the main

<sup>4</sup> The dailies are arranged from the most to the least politically influenced.

characteristics of the present press in Bulgaria. For example, every Bulgarian oligarch has his own media. This feature is also clarified by Popova (2004, 108) and Kunczik (2001): the domination of private media groups that exercise monopoly simultaneously infringes the free market and speech. Equally, Iankov (*24 Chasa*) states that today's newspapers are more related to economic associations, not to political parties. Therefore, politicians do not directly influence the media like that it was under the communism. The control over the press is exercised by financial leverage, as Bajomi-Lazar (2001), Kunczik (2001), Popova (2004) and Lauk (2008) also note. Media trades with its influence by selling it to different political and business groups.

Businessmen and politicians do not directly dictate what journalists to write. However, they can still control the media (Karaboev, *Dnevnik*). There are subtle techniques for remote control in the Bulgarian press and I exemplify some of them. First, Iankov (*24 Chasa*) states that the owners (WAZ) have no say about the newspapers' publications. However, he notes that if the owners realize that the daily systematically publishes articles with negative connotation about Germany, WAZ will exercise control. The other way of exercising leverage over the content is when the owners "kindly" ask the newspaper to cover some events (for example the charity activity of the German ambassador).

Second, Tunev (*Monitor*) and Punchev (*Standart*) declare that they have never changed or unpublished international news because of political leverage. On the other hand, Tunev states that he is aware of what information to publish, i.e. there is self censorship. For example, he states that *Monitor* is very sensitive to topics related to Turkey or Turkish people especially if the news has negative connotation because the owner's son, Peevski, is a member of the Turkish party in Bulgaria. Tunev notes that before the publishing of *Monitor* the owner has the final look at it and the final word whether this news will be published or not. The owner is the main censor. However, Tunev states that he manages to balance between the owner's

policy and the journalistic objectivity by citing the international sources. The sources protect the journalists in a sense that if they publish a news that concerns Bulgarian business interests, a reporter can say that his publication relies on certain source. However, the previous analysis that refers to the findings of the survey shows that *Monitor* has considerable amount of political influence. Thus, Lauk's (2008, 198) argument that journalists and political leaders cooperate can be transferred into today's collaboration between the owners and publishers of media with the political leaders.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the newspapers shows that the most politically influenced papers (*Duma* and *Monitor*) are the ones which contain more quality publications, if the negative criterion of the political gravitation is disregarded. On the other hand, *24 Chasa* and *Standart* could be described as hybrids that combine features of the quality press with elements of the tabloid press. The only elitist newspaper *Dnevnik*, which officially claims to present the quality press, still has weaknesses and consequently it stays between the first and the second group. The analysis demonstrates that the professional standards vary for each editorial team, i.e. they are not recognized by the whole journalistic community.

There is no clear distinction between serious and tabloid press: the serious content is mixed with the gossipy content. When it comes to quality, a paper defines itself as quality one if it focuses on the formal coverage of topics, regions and themes, which are primary considered as important. Thus, the emphasis is put on the sole fact that a newspaper has covered an event; instead on the how the event has been covered by the daily. It is not taken into consideration the quality of the publications. Thus, the quality of the international news is questionable: there is lack of citation of sources; presence of considerable amount of tabloid articles in the quality press; indirect and direct owners' interfere in editing process; mixture between facts and comments. The latter brings politicization of the papers. A broader knowledge and understanding of the international events is missing in the international sections of the dailies. There is a general tendency of episodically reporting of events that diminishes the access to international news of people who are not specialists in this field. All these items are a sign that the press is still developing and professionalism is low level.

The analysis demonstrates that the press have not changed or developed much since the beginning of the Bulgarian transition. Freedom of the press is mostly suppressed in the

domestic topics. However, international news is also politicized. Consequently, politicization is related to another negative factor: the political and economic dependence of the press. Still the non-transparent funding, oligarchic structures and monopoly are a major concern that the press should overcome in order to become truly independent. Additionally, the unclear sources of the media capital (Popova 2004) represent a major problem because this way the freedom of press is undermined. It can be further concluded that currently in Bulgaria economic interests are stronger than political interests, although many times they mix. As Schulz (2001, 53) argues this is a misleading practice because the press should not be dependent on any political, economic or other type of interest.

Today's press has made a major shift from politicization to economization (meaning economic dependence). This shift has distorted the distribution of political deviation of the dailies in alliance with the openly declared political attachment that was typical for the beginning of the transition period. Nowadays it is hard to define which of the two models that Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe matches the Bulgarian press. Both models are misleadingly mixed. First, each daily offers different perspective of events, which should be in accordance to the editorial's agenda and hidden political and business interests. Secondly, despite that all of the examined newspapers claim to report objectively and to be politically neutral the analysis shows that all of them have political deviations as well as professional weaknesses. Thus, the vicious circle of political dependence is not broken. As can be seen from the low quality of professionalism the journalistic community is still incapable to take its responsibility and to enforce the development of the media. Political parties changed the way of exercising influence over the media. The one way direction of political influence was known in the beginning of the transition was replaced by more complicated scheme. The influence over the press is exercised through the additional channel of business that is the basic linkage between political interests and press.

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**Interviews conducted with:**

Iankov, Rosen. Second chief editor of the newspaper *24 Chasa* [conducted 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010, 5.00 p.m.]

Karaboev, Petar. Second chief editor of the newspaper *Dnevnik* [conducted 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010, 4.00 p.m.]

Mladenova, Galina. Chief editor of the international news of newspaper *Duma* [conducted 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010, 2.30 p.m.]

Tunev, Vecheslav. Chief editor of the International news of newspaper *Monitor* [conducted 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010, 3.30 p.m.]

Vladislav, Punchev. Chief editor of the international news of newspaper *Standart* [conducted 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010, 9.30 a.m.]

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Questions of Interviews with the Newspaper's Editors**

The interviews of the editors represent their position of the problem. By giving the tribune to the people who write the news I reflect their position for the news-making process and this makes my thesis objective. The interviewes are semi structured.

#### **Questions:**

##### *The PUBLISHING PROCESS*

1. What is the process/proxy of creating international news?
2. What are the criteria for your decision to choose a particular international news or story?
3. How many people do work on the international editorial team? / What is the hierarchy of the editors in the newspaper? / What is the role of the editors in your newspaper? / How many edits has each article?

##### *The CRITERIA for the sources*

4. Could you name the sources that your newspaper mostly uses? / What are the criteria for the choice of international sources?
5. Do you rely on certain sources for certain topics?
6. I notice that on some occasions you do not mention a source for an international story. Can you explain to me why? What is the reason for publishing international articles without saying the source?

The *POLITICAL DEVIATION*

7. How do you see your papers' relationship with the political parties?
8. Why do you think there is this public perceptin of your paper's political leanings?
9. Why is there prevailing amount of left/right/central political opinions in your paper?
10. How do you see, plot your paper vis a vis the other major dailies?