

Macedonia

Analysis of TV prime time domestic news on MTV and A1

STRONG FOCUS ON POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

David Vitkov

Introduction

The media landscape in the Republic of Macedonia

The television media landscape in Macedonia is comprised of national and local stations. There are six television stations holding a national broadcasting license: A1, Kanal 5, Sitel, Telma, Alsat M and MTV (state owned with three channels). In terms of popularity, A1 television is the most popular, followed by Sitel, Kanal 5, MTV, Alsat M and then Telma.

News on television in Macedonia

News is a major part of the program of television stations in the Republic of Macedonia. All national television stations broadcast news program several times per day. Ratings surveys also indicate that news is among the highest rated programs on television in Macedonia.

In terms of prime time news, the national channels broadcast their programs each night between the hours of 17:00 and 22:00. Thus news can be watched non-stop during this period on different channels. Kanal 5, Sitel and A1 television do not clash with each other in terms of their prime time broadcasts (17:00, 18:00 and

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19:00 respectively). Telma broadcasts its prime time news at 18:30, thus beginning during the Sitel prime time news and lasting until after the start of the news on A1. MTV broadcasts at 19:30, which is after the main bloc of news on A1, but at the same time as the second prime-time news program on Kanal 5 which also starts at this time.

MTV

Macedonian Television (MTV) is the national public broadcasting service. It has three channels, MTV1, MTV2 (channel broadcasting in the languages of the non-majority ethnic and linguistic communities in Macedonia) and the Parliamentary Channel which broadcasts live from the Parliament when it is in session and other types of programs when it is not in session.

It should be noted that it is the prime time news on MTV1 that is the subject of this project.

The program content on MTV1 mainly comprises news and cultural and informational programs of public interest. The channel achieves its highest ratings during its broadcasts of UEFA Champions League football matches. The quality standard of the feed of its programs is lower than on commercial channels in Macedonia.

News programs are broadcast several times per day on MTV1, beginning with short bulletins between the hours 07:00 and 09:00. The first major news program is on at 12:00, then at 16:00. The prime time news program is broadcast at 19:30 each evening and there is a late night bulletin around 22:00.

A1 Television

A1 Television, established in 1994, was the first privately owned television station. The station is based in Skopje, but has reporters scattered throughout the country.

The program content on A1 television is quite diverse, including news, entertainment, call-in programs, sport, movies and series. The station has many high rating foreign programs and the quality of presentation of programs is generally quite high.

The news on A1 is broadcast several times per day. In the morning there are very short news bulletins at 07:30 and 09:00

(from Monday to Friday only), while in the afternoon there is a 15 min bulletin at 16:00. The main prime time news program is on at 19:00. However, this program is divided into several different thematic programs: A1 News (30 min), Economy (15 min), Sport (10 min) and Weather (5 min). Although in theory these programs are listed as separate programs in the official schedule, it is de facto a one hour continuous broadcast, separated only by commercials. A late evening news bulletin lasting 30 min usually begins at around 23:00 each night.

Analysis of content

In this part of the analysis the main focus shall be put on the contents of the news presented by the monitored media. Through the prism of territorial distribution of news¹, the form in which the news was presented, the content of news and the attitude of the presenters, as well as the length of the news item, 16 prime time news programs were monitored during a period of one month. All prime time news items aired by the chosen media (one private: A1 and one public: MTV1) were classified according to the following areas:

- Domestic political life news;
- Country's international politics;
- World affairs news;
- War crimes news;
- Economy, finance and business news;
- Social protection and healthcare news;
- Culture and art news;
- Education news;
- Science news;
- Ecology news;
- Religion news;
- Youth and children news, and
- Sport and recreation news.

¹ For the purpose of research, the territory of the Republic of Macedonia was divided into seven territorial regions: Skopje, Pelagonija, Povardarie, Polog, Ohrid, Bregalnica and Kumanovo region.

Generally, most of the news presented by both media outlets was about domestic political life or the economy/finance sphere. On the other hand, there were a number of world affairs news items presented by these media, however most of them are only taken from international news agencies. Other news, such as social care, culture, education, science, ecology, religion and youth news, is present in small measure in the prime time news programs in Macedonian media. Consequently, the following part of the analysis will have the above mentioned news items as its main objective.

Also taken into consideration during the analysis of prime time news was the content, the currency of news, the level of attractiveness, the level of analytical approach and the level of prescriptivism.

Domestic political life news

As stated in the previous section, domestic political news has the largest share in the total prime time news presented in the monitored media². For example, events in the Macedonian Parliament are the most covered topics by these stations. Disputes between the ruling and opposition parties are almost always presented, with quotations from parliamentary discussions. Other interesting topics for journalists are internal political party affairs. After the elections in July 2006 and the change in government, there were internal party changes in the largest party in opposition, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM). Personnel changes in leading positions in the party were very "hot" topics for all domestic media in Macedonia. Also, there were some changes in leading positions in some smaller parties in this period, however these were overshadowed by the larger political parties³.

² This statement can be applied to other broadcast media in Macedonia, as well as some local broadcast and print media.

³ In April, SDSM and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) celebrated their anniversaries, followed by a celebration of events in front of the Parliament, which was used for criticising the ruling party. Of course such events are always interesting for journalists.

Taking into account the territorial dispersion and coverage of news, most political news and events take place in Skopje compared to other parts of Macedonia. Following last year's elections and establishment of a new government, this situation is slightly changing. Once a week government ministers visit cities and villages outside Skopje. Consequently these visits very often are followed by the media with journalists' recorded statements of these events⁴.

In particular, looking at the monitored media, the public service predominantly presents news from domestic political life. Hence, this type of news holds 25% of the total prime time news, while on A1's prime time news, it is in second place with a share of 21% of the total news presented. Analysing the content of news and attitude of journalist concerning the news, presentation in the monitored media differs significantly⁵. It is a general perception that MTV to a larger extent compared to A1 presents news with a positive content and with a positive attitude on the part of journalists. On the other hand, A1 mostly presents news with a negative or neutral content and it is accompanied by journalists'⁶ neutral attitude. This is one of the main reasons why A1 television is perceived by Macedonian citizens as the most objective and independent medium with highly professional journalists and neutrally oriented news⁷. In respect of the form in which domestic political news was presented, the number of news items is very similar. Most of the domestic political news is presented in the form of journalists' recorded statements covering a day's event and to a smaller extent such news has thematic coverage.

⁴ Almost always these events are followed and presented by the local media of that particular region and by the public broadcasting service.

⁵ See annex, Chart: "Comparison of news content and attitude of journalists between MTV and A1."

⁶ This is very evident especially in presentation of domestic political live news and economy/business and finance news.

⁷ According to the latest survey by the Institute for Democracy for Media in Macedonia A1 is observed as the most independent medium, with an average grade of 4.11 out of 5. More information at:

<http://www.idscs.org.mk/upload/news>

Minority issues⁸ in the news to a large extent are covered by the media. In the monitored period, the largest minority party (Albanian - *Democratic Union for Integration-DUI*) was operating outside the Parliament and negotiations on its return to Parliament were popular. Almost after each negotiation round, all media broadcast news items on these events. The difference between the monitored media with respect to these events was evident. The public broadcasting service usually presented the outcome of the negotiation process as a "*step forward*", while according to presentations in private media, "*the process is deadlocked*."

News regarding Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integrations, according to the methodology proposed in the survey, naturally should be classified as the country's international news. However, thanks to the political actors in the country and thanks to the media, this issue is treated as a daily domestic political topic. Statements by EU officials very often are interpreted in different ways by the political parties in Macedonia and again differently by the media. In this respect it is important to mention that both TV stations lack a professional approach to this type of news, concerning the vocabulary and terminology of EU institutions, as well as names of foreign politicians. This should be of high importance for the media in the country, having in mind that there will be a lot of news of this kind in the coming period.

Country's international politics

With respect to this subsection of the analysis, three general topics presented by the monitored media can be pointed out here:

- Macedonian minorities in neighbouring countries;
- Kosovo issues;
- Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration.

News on the country's international politics to a larger extent is covered by the public TV station (14% of total prime time news), while in A1 prime time news this share is only 4%. For

⁸ I will use the term minority as a widely accepted term, although in Macedonia this term is substituted by the term *community*.

example, with regard to an event that took place in Ohrid in which heads of state from the region were present, the public service broadcast almost ten minutes on this event, while for the same story the private service broadcast less than three minutes.

The future status of Kosovo and visits of Macedonian politicians there are another interesting topic for media in this country. Having in mind the political circumstances in the country concerning the large number of Albanians in Macedonia, it is obvious why this topic is tracked by the media. Another reason for following the events in Kosovo is that it is directly linked with stability in the region and Macedonia in particular.

The strategic goal of the Macedonian government to join EU institutions takes up a considerable amount of time in prime time news. These items usually are presented in two ways: either as events related to this topic that happened in the country or as events that occurred outside the country.

In general, for these types of news stories, the following can be concluded:

- Most of the news presented are items with recorded statements on a day's event or thematic coverage of an event (the last conclusion is relevant only for MTV);
- The attitude of journalists of the public broadcasting service with respect to these news items is generally positive, as is the content of the news, while the country's international news with negative content is presented in small measure on this TV station (MTV1);

World affairs

World affairs news in the both news programs analysed is separated from other news, broadcast in one bloc, named "news from the world". In general, several conclusions can be drawn with respect to these news items:

- Almost all world affairs news happened in other countries (only one out of 69 world affairs news stories happened in Macedonia in the monitored period⁹);

⁹ A Summit of Heads of State from the region and beyond that took place in Ohrid.

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- Most of the news broadcast was taken from international agencies and to a smaller extent journalists were present at the event and recorded statements were taken;
- Most of the news presented by both media had negative content (accidents, tragedies, bomb attacks, etc.), while the attitude of journalists in general was neutral;

Business, finance, economy news

For business, financial or economic news, it can be said that it is a new positive and developing trend in Macedonian prime time news. Although these news items have been present in the media for a longer period, it is evident that TV stations in the last few years have significantly improved the quality of the information presented, the level of knowledge and professionalism of reporters, as well as the time allocated to these news stories.

Business news on A1 is in first place according to the time allocated in respect of the total prime time news, taking up around 37% of the total prime time news. This station has a team of journalists who are at the level of experts in this area. But they are very analytical and critically oriented in their approach, which of course increases the level of quality of the information presented. On the other hand, business news in the public service contained positive content and was presented with positive attitude of journalists. MTV reports on economy, mainly presenting the positive steps that the Government is taking for bringing in foreign investors, etc. This can be presented through reporting on the prohibition of exports to Kosovo by one of the largest Macedonian oil companies (OKTA). On MTV this news item, with an implicitly negative content and of enormous importance for Macedonian economy, was presented for only 15 seconds in the middle of the news. In contrast, on A1 this story was mentioned in the headlines and was further elaborated in the economy part of the news. It seems that the public television (MTV) intends to hide something, while the commercial A1 intends to explain it.

Culture, social protection and health care, education and religion news

In this part of the analysis, the focus will be on the other news categories recorded in the methodology, which do not take up a significant part of the total news presented. Cumulatively taken, in both media outlets these news items, in total, comprise around 15% of the news.

A1 and MTV more or less commit equal time to these news stories. In particular, healthcare and social protection news items have the largest share here, as well as cultural news. In the public service there is a separate bloc of news named "culture" which presents these type of news items mostly linked with Macedonian culture. On the other hand, A1 has a campaign, as a media sponsor of the presentation and promotion of one of the most significant Macedonian historic figures, Krste Petkov-Misirkov, and his book "On Macedonian Matters". This is a positive trend developed by A1, as well as the public service, for promoting cultural activities and events in the country. Almost always, cultural news stories contain positive content and journalists invariably have a positive attitude, except in one case presented by both stations where the content was negative¹⁰. Namely, it was a story of a person who found a statue from an ancient period and asked for a huge amount of money in order to give the statute to the relevant state institution. Nevertheless, these items were evaluated as news with negative content and contained a negative attitude on the part of the journalist.

Other news

The section "other news" unexpectedly covered a large part of prime time news. In percentage terms, 13% of the total time spent on news is on the account of this category of news. Crime or accident news items mostly made up this section. Unfortunately, this is a negative trend present in the region, which is taking place in Macedonia too. Sensationalism and "shocking" news can even be found in the first five minutes of

¹⁰ A1 and MTV prime time news on 21 April 2007.

the prime time news and in the headlines. The A1 TV station is in larger measure presenting this type of news, while the public service is more selective in presenting this news. However, in general this news is accompanied by negative or neutral attitude on the part of journalists¹¹.

Trends

Number of presenters

The number of presenters during the prime time broadcast on the two stations differs. On MTV there are two anchors, while on A1 there is only one anchor.

Gender structure of anchors/presenters

The gender structure of the news anchors on MTV is one male and one female anchor presenting the news together. This is a new format that was introduced on MTV this year. Prior to this there was only one anchor, usually rotating between men and women.

In contrast, on A1 television there is only one female anchor presenting the news. A1 has only two female presenters in total who alternate during the week. This is something that was introduced on the station this year. Prior to this there was a group of presenters, both male and female, who rotated throughout the week.

It should also be noted that the economy and finance section of news on A1 is always presented by the same male or female presenter. Thus A1 is making an effort to be consistent in order to build viewer loyalty by always having familiar faces read the news.

Commercials as part of the program open or structure of the news program

Commercials are an important feature of prime time news on A1 television. There is a consistent structure that is followed in each nightly broadcast. Following an announcement of the main news headlines, the first bloc of commercials is aired. The next bloc of news usually follows about ten minutes later or in the middle of the news program. Commercials follow the conclusion

¹¹ For more information see Annex I.

of the 30 minute news bloc and are aired before the beginning of the economy news bloc. The same occurs before the start of the sports news bloc.

It is also interesting that an advertisement is incorporated into the lead up to the news bloc before 19:00. This takes the form of a display of a clock, at 18:59:30, and the logo of a company. Evidently the purpose of this clock is not to inform viewers of the time, but to give a company an opportunity to purchase prime time advertising space.

There are no advertisements during news broadcast on MTV. However, it should be noted that although MTV is a public broadcast channel, advertisements do appear during broadcasts of other programs.

No extreme deviation from ethical or professional norms

No extreme deviations from ethical or professional norms were recorded. However, as already mentioned, A1 television promoted events organised by the "Ramkovski Foundation". Mr. Ramkovski is the owner of A1 television and is involved with the foundation whose activities are mainly cultural and philanthropic. News items concerning the organisation were not featured on other channels, including the national broadcasting service MTV1, during the surveyed period.

Quality of presentation

The quality of presentation on A1 is very high. The presenters are well spoken, well groomed and professionally dressed. A1 is also the leading station in terms of graphics. As for the reporters, all are well spoken and professional in their approach. This is also the case with the public broadcasting service, however one must say that the quality of the broadcast on MTV is not high compared to A1. The graphics, style and presentation have been revamped in recent times and are better than was the case previously, however aesthetically speaking, A1 makes a more polished presentation.

Hierarchy of news/items during the news program

The hierarchy of news items during the news program follows a similar format on both the public and commercial channels.

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Top news, followed by world news, economic news and sport and then weather (although the last two were not part of the news). The format was slightly different on MTV in that economic news was sometimes placed prior to world news.

Territorial distribution - news from Skopje dominates

Although less than half of the population of Macedonia lives in the city of Skopje, more than half of the total news stories concerned events in Skopje. In terms of territorial distribution, some 77% of all news items were from Skopje. This is understandable, given that the political, cultural and social centre of the country is Skopje, and naturally most news items will originate from this city. However, this should not mean that news in other parts of the country should not be covered at a higher rate than is currently the case (only 13%).

Selection of top news

The top news item in the news programs always covered a domestic story. No foreign news item ever opened the news bulletin. On A1 the top story was invariably a domestic political news item or a business or corruption news item. On MTV the top news item was almost always a domestic political story.

Conclusion

Domestic political news and economic and financial news is covered the most on A1 and MTV. In terms of domestic political news, on the commercial television channel it represents 21% of the total prime time news content, whereas on the public broadcasting channel this number is slightly higher at 25%. The general attitude on A1 towards such news is negative to neutral, both in content and attitude, while on MTV it is generally neutral. As for economic and financial news, this category also takes up a significant part of the news. Its share on A1 is a high 37% of the total news content.

Another topic that was covered on a regular basis is Macedonia's international politics. Here it was observed that in the public broadcasting service there were three topics that were

consistently presented. These were Macedonian minorities in neighbouring countries, issues relating to Kosovo, and Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration. The country's international politics presented around 14% of the total prime time news on MTV, while this number was just under 5% for A1 news.

Other topics that were covered from time to time included culture, social protection and health care, education and religion. In total, these comprised around 15% of the total news on both the public and commercial television stations covered in this survey. Cultural stories in particular were presented in a positive manner in terms of content and attitude. It should also be mentioned that 'other' news covered a large part of the prime time news. In percentage terms, 13% of the total time spent on news goes on the account of this news, mostly made up of crime or accident news items.

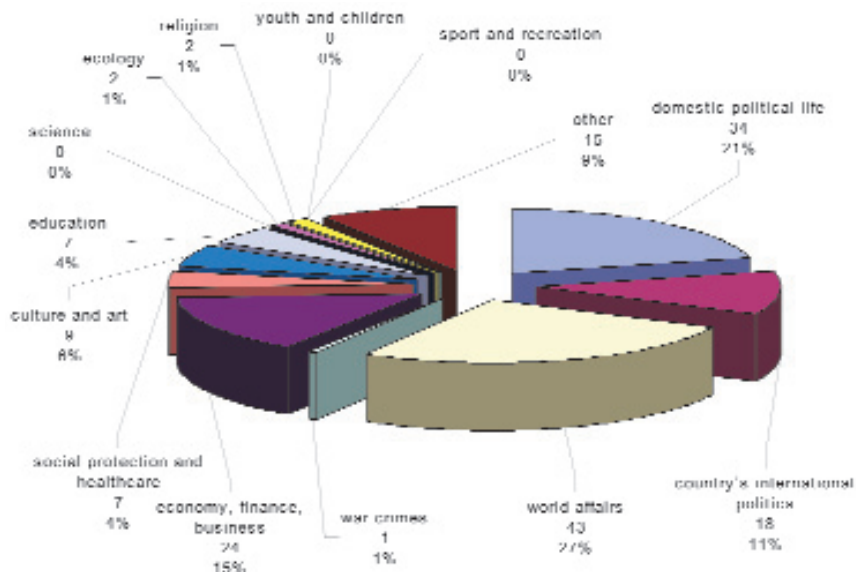
In terms of trends, the format slightly differed on A1 compared to MTV as the former had only one presenter (always female), whereas the latter had two presenters (one male and one female). Commercials featured strongly in the A1 prime time news broadcast, while they were absent from the MTV broadcast. The quality of presentation on A1 was higher than MTV, although the latter has made an effort in recent times to improve the quality of its product. Also, no major violations of ethical or professional norms were recorded.

Finally, it should be noted that there should be a more equal territorial distribution of news items. Given that the political, cultural and social centre of the country is Skopje, naturally most news items will originate from this city. However, this should not mean that news in other parts of the country should not be covered at a higher rate than is currently the case.

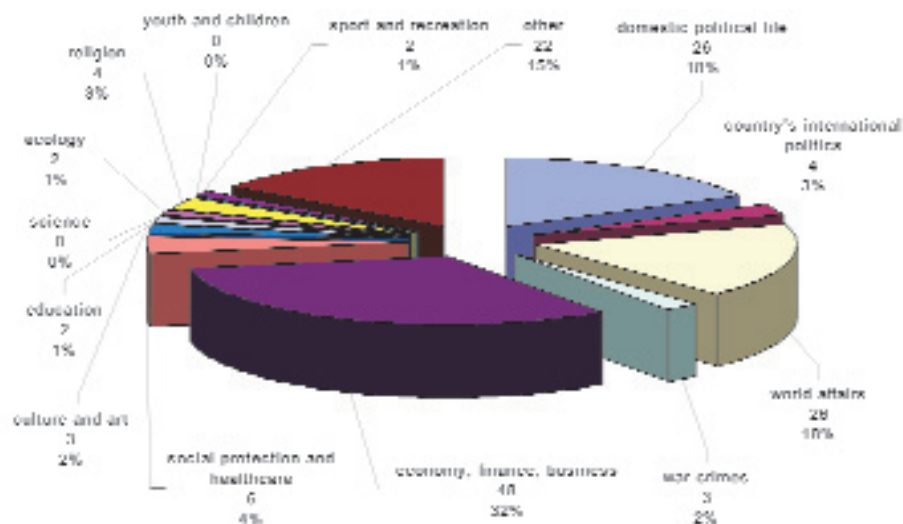
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Statistics

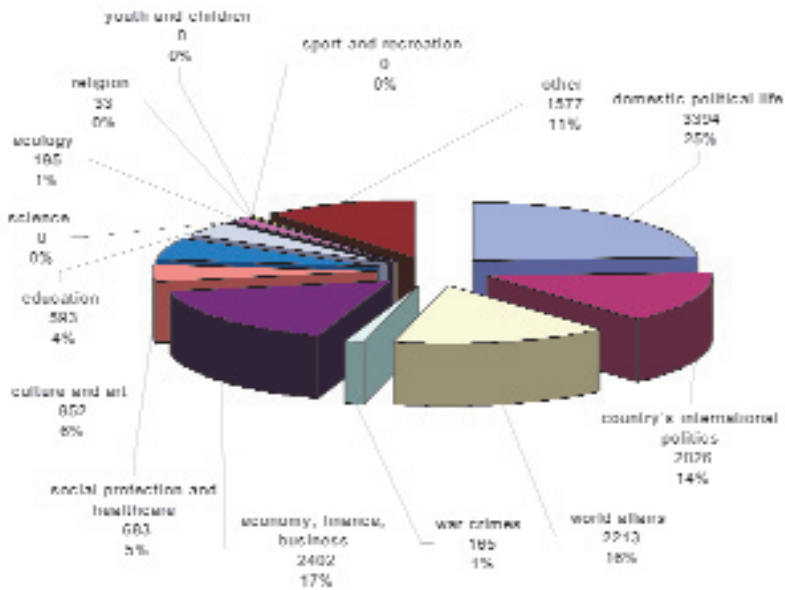
MTV - TOPIC



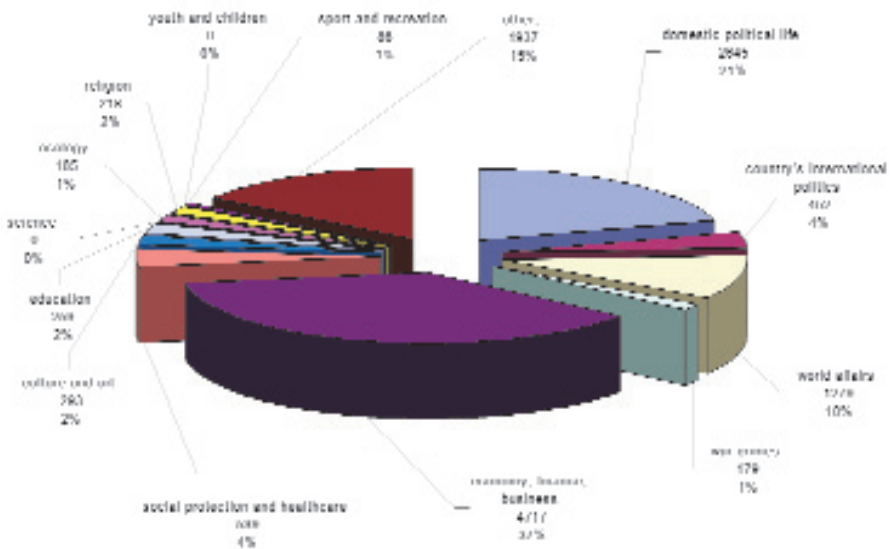
A1 - TOPIC



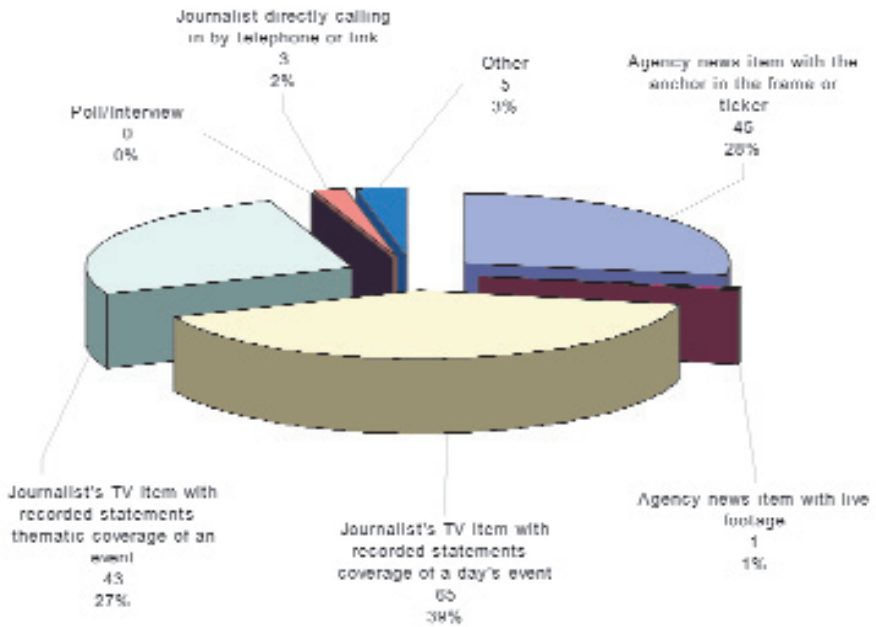
MTV - LENGHT OF ITEM CONTENT



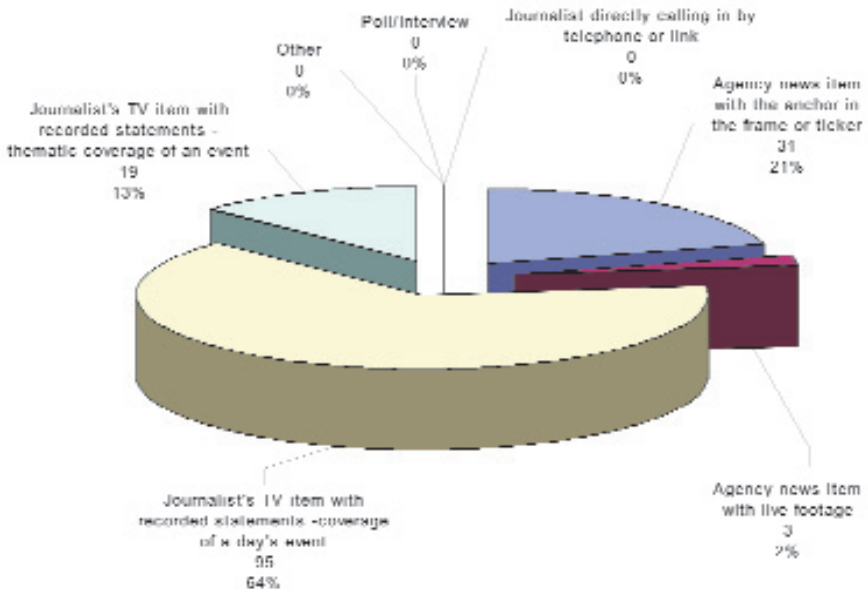
A1 - LENGHT OF ITEM CONTENT



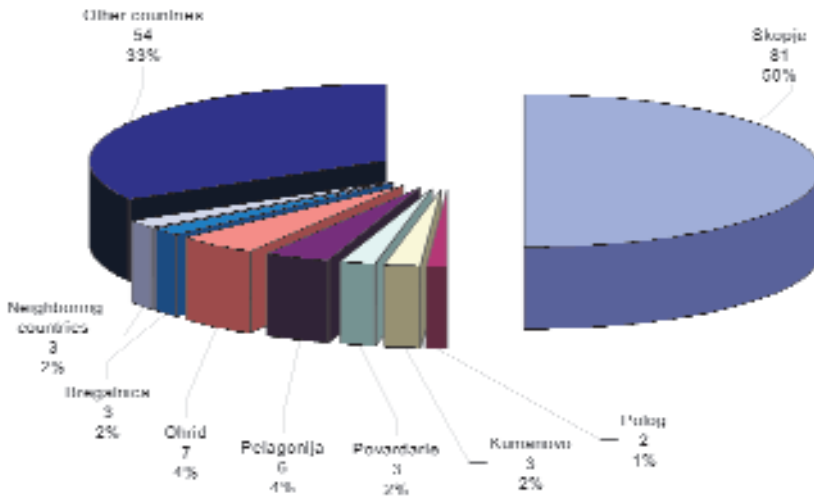
MTV - FORM



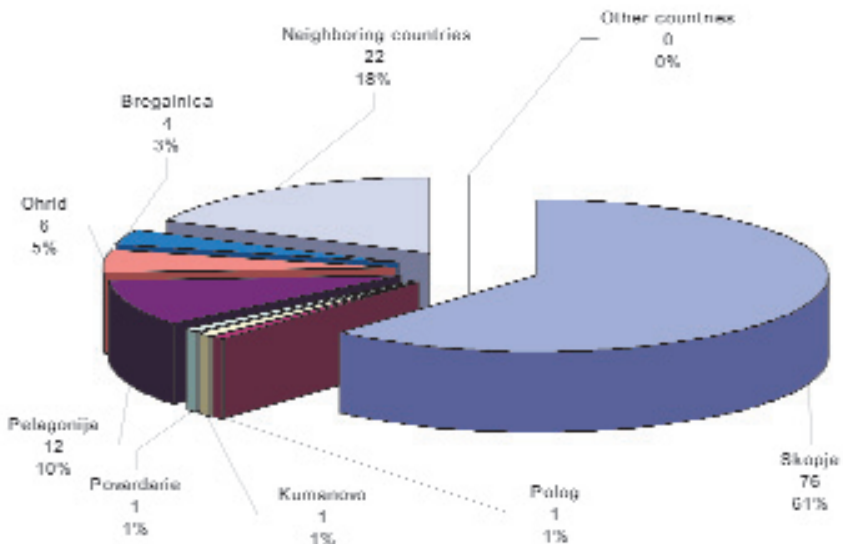
A1 - FORM



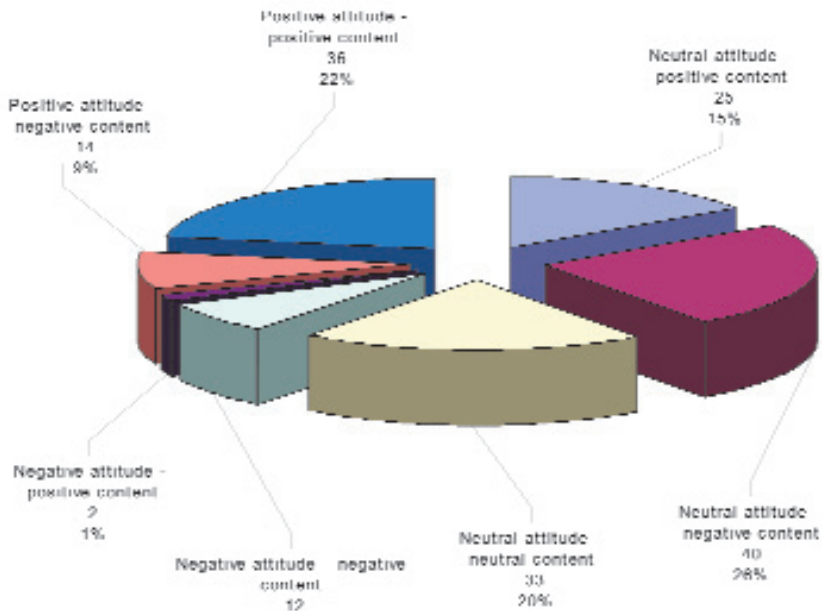
MTV - TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION



A1 - TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION



**MTV - EVALUATION OF CONTENT
- ORIENTATION TO THE SUBJECT**



**A1 - EVALUATION OF CONTENT
- ORIENTATION TO THE SUBJECT**

