

Silencing the Press:

Press and Media Freedom in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Event: [ALDE](#) hearing

Date: Tuesday, 20 September, 2011 18,30-20,30

Location: Brussels, EU Parliament ASP 5G1

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Alike as in the book "Alice in Wonderland" written by Lewis Carroll, as well as in Macedonia - another wonderland - one Macedonian has lived. Macedonian has always been quiet, modest and obedient. But, as the time went by, Macedonian became aware that perhaps his head is next to be put in guillotine. One turbulent night, a Macedonian was witness of the beheading of another Macedonian, who was in his vicinity. Then he asked himself: "What is going to happen with me? It looks like that here all people terribly want to cut off somebody's head. It's a real miracle that someone so far stayed alive".

This is how the story of Macedonian in Wonderland began, whose end is not yet known to me. The only thing that I know is that in Wonderland, the role of King of Heart plays our Prime Minister - Nikola Gruevski, whereas the role of Queen of Heart plays the Minister of Internal Affairs - Gordana Jankulovska. Thus, any wish and dissatisfaction of the King of Heart is a commandment for the Queen of Heart and immediately to cut off the heads of non-believers and opponents. Anyone who will try to disturb the King of Heart or to try to spoil his game, he/she will be brought to dreadful judgment under emergency procedure. And the dreadful judgment consists of which if not the King and Queen of Heart, while in the role of jurors are executioners who carry out the will of these two. To be even more interesting, first the sentence is executed and then the verdict is being announced.

For all activities related to public relations and premature imposing of penalties is responsible the executioner Spade which is embodied in the spokesman person of the Ministry of Internal Affairs - Ivo Kotevski. Here is also the gendarme Club as one of the jurors as well as close collaborator to the royal couple - Aleksandar Bicikliski, who in charge of quick interventions under the motto "the attack is the best defense". The supporting roles are played by the other executioners known as the unit for special tasks "Tiger" and the special mobile unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs "Alpha", that beat as "alpha" males. From the courtroom constantly echo the words of the Queen of Heart: "Cut off their heads!". And even if there is no reason, they will find it. Even they can make up a legal paragraph in order to preserve the "democracy" of the trials. The justification of the actions should never be brought into question.

On June 6, 2011 (Monday), the next day after the parliamentary elections I had a rehearsal in the theater from early in the morning until late in the evening. When I got back home, I turned on the TV and I heard surprising news. Politically motivated arrests and prosecutions, bipartisan spitting, speech of hate... But I'm used to the political (non) culture in Macedonia and this situation did not surprise me. We get used to the things that are part of our daily life. The thing that didn't leave me indifferent was the headline on the news that on the Main Town square, where in the past I was sitting with my friends on the benches, watching the sunrise, violently died a young man's life!

I was searching on internet in order to compare various sources and information that I found were disappointing: Another case of police brutality, which this time resulted with a death of 22 years old young man. Even worse, the official statement from the authorities SVR-Skopje (given at 4:08 pm) was opposite to the statements of witnesses given to some of the media, which clearly support the fact that it was an attempt to cover up the murder, committed by a member of the police. The details for the murder are already known to the public. Do I want to live in a country where such murders are being treated as accidents? Of course NOT. Can I close my eyes in front of the unprofessionalism of the police members and their solidarity in covering up the murder, committed by members of the police? NO. Could I restrain myself and not to speak out loudly: Stop the police brutality! NO. Can I go alone against all? NO. As people say: One swallow does not make a summer!

The only positive thing that dark night was the information that young people already organized themselves via social networks and went out on the streets of Skopje, in order to raise their voice against police brutality, to ask for answers and to demand accountability from the relevant institutions of the system. I wasn't hesitating nor a single moment, that now is the time for reaction. Otherwise, I would feel like as a co-partner in concealing and in covering up the murder of a young man and perhaps I would leave a space for murder of me one day, which will end up with the same epilogue as this, that the institutions planned to impose to the public. The next day, I phoned one friend of mine and we went together to protest on the streets.

Immediately after my appearance in the media as one of the protesters, I was faced with discrediting, labeling and attempts for damaging of my public reputation. Pro-government media under the guidance of VMRO-DPMNE through their party megaphones began to distribute unsubstantiated information to the public. All those who publicly supported the protests against the police brutality and stood for completely resolving of the case concerning the murder of Martin Neskoski (by a police officer) were target of these particular media which are close to the government. The initial information that they spread in the public was our eventual connection with the affair "Hope" and former President of the Republic of Macedonia - Mr. Branko Crvenkovski, as well as our connection with SDSM i.e. that our ultimate goal is not justice, but an attempt to overthrow the government only one week after the elections on which VMRO-DPMNE won. Then there were insinuations that we are close collaborators of Vladimir Milcin and Soros Foundation. As a dessert were served our heads circled with red circles and disinformation that we were part of a training course that took place in Belgrade, where we gained knowledge how to organize such protests.

A fiasco followed by organizing of counter-protests in front of the headquarters of SDSM directed by the offspring of VMRO-DPMNE. The protests finished the same day on which they started. The young people did not even know why the protest and it was more than obvious that they were politically manipulated and instructed persons.

After many unsuccessful attempts to silence us the pro-government media has served the last specialty on the menu - that is the lie that we are well organized mercenaries of the foreign intelligence services, primarily Americans.

Please allow me to tell you the truth and to inform you why we were protesting. ([video](#))

After the broadcast of the story on Sitel television and on the internet portal kurir.mk, I sent written denial, but unfortunately they didn't publish it. I even called Sitel television on 16 June and I asked them to link me with informative desk shortly before the news at 18 o'clock, in order to take part in

the news in live and to deny that misinformation. They refused to do that, because they didn't want the truth to be revealed. Luckily, the other media published the denial and the public found out the truth.

After the broadcast of the story, I received threats and intimidations, for which I immediately informed OSCE and Ministry of Internal Affairs. Going on the streets of Skopje, every day I face up with positive and negative comments. Some people congratulate us for the zeal and they support us unselfishly in what we are trying to do and they also support our cause. Many of the people were or are part of the protests, but there are also people who want to become part of them in future. Negative experiences are curses, inappropriate roll calls and often I can see calls for my burning at stake or public hanging. In any case, I am not afraid of this at all and I will continue to support this civil initiative until the justice prevail and until the actions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are being reviewed and reformed as well as its members.

I honestly hope that we will have a successful epilogue from the protests, which would entail adoption and implementation of the requirements from the petition submitted to many institutions. The requirements are: full clarification of the murder of Martin Neskoski, determination of criminal liability and sanctions for the perpetrator of the murder, as well as for all involved people who were complicit or tried to conceal the crime. On long term, implementation of the police reforms according to the criteria and suggestions proposed in our petition.

I would like to take this opportunity and to thank the Ombudsman of the Republic of Macedonia - Ixhet Memeti, the President of the Republic of Macedonia - Dr. Gjorge Ivanov, who supported the protests as a form of expression of the critical opinion of the citizens and have promised their active participation in the discussion within their competences. I am particularly glad that the President, who although comes from VMRO-DPMNE, with his open letter demonstrated impartiality and he identified the decision of the citizens, driven by this big tragedy, to get involved and to express their views as an honest initiative and sincere desire to contribute to the improvement of the democracy.

With that he confirmed that the President should and must be a President of all citizens, regardless of the fact from which party he was nominated at the presidential elections. I hope that the new officials, who recently came to power, will follow the example of our President and that they will have an impartial approach in working with the citizens, regardless of their nationality or party affiliation, religion, sexual orientation...!