



FINAL REPORT
MEDIA MONITORING
POPULATION CENSUS 2021

Skopje, October 2021

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1. SUMMARY

The Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of North Macedonia, 20 years after the last Census in 2002, was initially scheduled to take place in the first half of the year, from April 1 to April 21, 2021. Due to a number of circumstances, primarily the new wave of the COVID19 pandemic, the Census was postponed for September 2021. On April 2, the Parliament adopted the changes to the relevant legislation that allowed for the postponement of the start of the Census for September 5. The formal decision to postpone the Census was preceded by a political agreement of the leaders of the two biggest political parties – SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE, endorsed and supported by the other parties represented in the Parliament.

During the period of preparation and before the definitive decision to postpone it, the media coverage and the public discourse on the Census were highly politicised, and the ethnicity-related aspects of the Census were also subject to a wide-spread discussion and debate, especially regarding the registration of the diaspora. The registration of the diaspora started on March 1 and was concluded on September 30, 2021. The politicisation and "ethnicisation" of the Census were predominantly manifested through numerous reactions by political actors and opinion-makers, in polemics and debate that criticized the Census as a "politically dictated process, and not the purely statistical operation it should be".

The previous monitoring reports found that the citizens were able to access full coverage and receive all the relevant information on the Census and the process of registration. In the pre-Census period, in the Spring of 2021, the politicisation and the "ethnicisation" were far more prominent and greatly overshadowed the information on the actual enumeration, while in the second monitoring period, the attention of the media was directed more on the actual conduct of the Census and the conditions in which the registration was conducted. In spite of a number of speculations on a possible extension of the Census after the legally prescribed deadline¹, due to so-called hacker attacks and the technical problems that emerged at the start of the registration process, the registration ended at 20.00 hours on September 30, as planned.

The State Statistical Office (SSO) announced that it will have the final results of the Census in six months' time, adding that some of the citizens who weren't registered, whatever the reason for that, will be enumerated in a process of cross-referencing with other electronic databases in which they are registered². According to SSO, as of 20.00 hours on September 30, a total of 204,805 members of the diaspora used the self-enumeration option, while census-takers in the country registered 1,832,696 persons, 568,185 households and 837,525 dwellings³.

¹ See in „Два дена до крајот на Пописот, се разгледува можноста за продолжување на попишувањето за неколку денови“, Alfa TV, September 28, 2021

² See in „Симовски: Пописот заврши успешно, резултатите до крајот на март 2022“.

³ Source: <https://popis2021.stat.gov.mk/#>

There were no serious difficulties or incidents registered during the Census, and there was only sporadic mention of citizens who refused to be registered. The allegations presented in some media reports and in statements by several political figures about some sort of organized boycott of the Census didn't materialise.

2. MONITORING METHODOLOGY

The subject of this monitoring is the coverage of the 2021 Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of North Macedonia by the broadcast and online media.

According to SSO's legal and operational framework⁴, there are two most commonly used definitions of a census. The first definition states that: "Census of Population, Households and Dwellings is a statistical operation which at regular intervals (usually ten years) officially counts the population of the country, from its smallest geographical territorial units to the country level, along with the defined demographic, social and economic characteristics of the total population". The second definition states that "the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings is a process of collecting, processing, assessing, analysing and disseminating data on the population, households and dwellings in a country (or in a precisely defined territory) in a specified time interval".

The main objective of the monitoring was to observe the manner in which the media report on the Census and the influence of their reporting on the levels of information available to the citizens and their participation in the process. The monitoring of the media coverage aimed to determine if the citizens have access to quality and comprehensive information on the Census and the influence that institutions and political entities in the country, as reported by the media, have on the Census.

An additional objective of the monitoring was to determine if the media provided professional and impartial coverage of the Census, if they published and disseminated disinformation and manipulative contents and whether the complementary coverage – columns, commentary, analysis and other similar types of content – influenced the approach and the tone of the media coverage of the statistical operation.

The media covered by the monitoring were selected to ensure coverage of a wide spectrum of editorial policies, i.e. media with pro-government, pro-opposition and generally balanced/neutral editorial policy. The information on the reach of the selected media and the size of their audiences was another important consideration in the selection process. The monitoring reports cover articles and news stories on the Census published and aired over the week-days (Monday to Friday), and in extraordinary situations of events of exceptional importance and if deemed necessary, the

⁴ Source SSO: <https://is.gd/VwldpQ>

monitoring also includes media contents published or aired over the weekends. One example was the coverage of the first day of the Census, September 5, which fell on Sunday.

The monitoring covered the following media outlets:

a) Broadcast media: the main daily newscasts of the public broadcasting service MRT1 and the commercial national terrestrial broadcasters Sitel TV, Telma TV, Alfa TV and Alsat-M TV (its main newscast in Macedonian).

b) Online news media: Kurir.mk, Frontline.mk, Plusinfo.mk and 360stepeni.mk.

The monitoring, in addition to the quantitative and qualitative analyses, relied on the method of content analysis that provided us with additional indicators on the manner in which the selected media outlets covered the Census. The analysis also included statistical analysis of the selected material in order to secure cross-referenced data and to confirm or amend the findings of the monitoring.

3. KEY FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

In the first monitoring period, March 15 – April 2, 2021, a total of 451 content units were aired and published (30.1 per day, on average), i.e. 111 TV news stories and 340 online articles.

During the 2nd monitoring period, September 5-30, the monitored media published a total of 309 units of content (16.2 per day on average), i.e. 77 TV news stories and 232 online articles.

Compared to the pre-census period, the number of content items published during the actual census-taking period dropped 31.5%. The drop of the volume of coverage is due mostly to the fewer political reactions during the Census.

During the preparatory period, among the broadcasters, the largest number of news stories was broadcast by Alfa TV (31), followed by Sitel TV (26), MRT1 (21), AlsatM TV (19) and Telma TV (14). During the Census, it was Alsat TV that led the way with 20 stories, followed by MRT1 (19), Alfa TV (15), Telma TV (12) and Sitel TV (11).

As far as online media are concerned, it was Frontline.mk that led the way (105), followed by Kurir.mk (97) and Plusinfo.mk (96), while 360stepeni.mk dedicated 42 news items to the Census. During the second monitoring period, Frontline.mk and Kurir.mk again were the most active with 94 and 62 articles, respectively, followed by 360stepeni.mk and Plusinfo.mk with 38 articles each.

In the first monitoring period, the media coverage was dominated by political and party reaction, which amounted to 60.5% of the total coverage. In the September monitoring period, we

registered a turnaround in terms of contents of the coverage. The information on the registration process took the lead (65% of all articles dedicated to the Census), while political reactions dropped to just 22.6% of the total coverage.

In the second monitoring period, SSO appeared as source of information in 76.1% of the total number of analysed contents. Frontline.mk, among the online media, most frequently relied on SSO as a source of information (74.4% of all published articles), as well as Kurir.mk (70.1%). All TV broadcasters used SSO as the main and leading source of information - Sitel TV (in 100% of its coverage), Telma TV (91.6%), MTV1 (89.5%), Alfa TV (86.6%) and Alsat TV (85%). The percentage is higher with the television broadcasters because they used more sources in their daily news coverage, including SSO on regular bases. On the other hand, the online media frequently published short news citing a single source.

The information received by SSO were predominantly presented technically, without any journalistic processing or effort to provide the context of the given story. That purely transmission oriented approach did have strong influence on the quality of information provided to the citizens. The key aspects of the Census were not give sufficiently analytical coverage, which would have provided higher quality coverage and information for the citizens.

Regarding the dominant reporting approaches and narratives, it should be noted that the preparatory period was dominated by political reactions, with institutions, including SSO, being slightly side-lined. The social-political context and the spread of the pandemic has made the Census one of the most important topics, with main political entities holding opposing views on whether the Census should be taken or postponed. For that reason, the focus of the coverage, instead on the preparations for the Census, moved on the political parties and their disagreements and reactions.

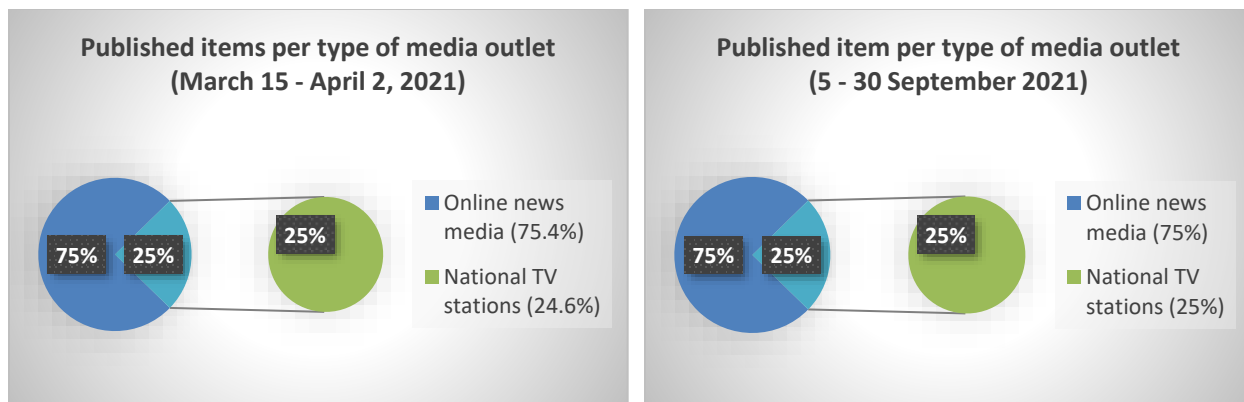
Once the Census started, the political cacophony slowly subsided and the reporting framework of the media moved towards reporting from the field on the actual process of registration. Although the pro-opposition media offered frequent criticism of the government and the state institutions regarding the quality of the process, from the viewpoint of the most frequently used narratives, they clearly didn't dispute the legitimacy and the importance of the Census.

One attempt at disinformation was noted in the case of reported information on the alleged preparations for a mass boycott of the Census in the last two weeks of the registration process. The attempts for wider dissemination of that particular narrative never gained momentum.

4. STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF MONITORING RESULTS

4.1. Volume of Coverage in Individual Monitored Media

In the first monitoring period, March 15 – April 2, 2021, a total of 451 content units were aired and published (30.1 per day, on average), i.e. 111 TV news stories (7.4 per day on average) and 340 online articles (22.6 per day). During the 2nd monitoring period, September 5 – September 30, the monitored media published a total of 309 units of content, i.e. 77 TV news stories (4.05 per day) and 232 online articles (12.21 per day).



Graphs 1 and 2: Published articles per type of media, (1) March 15 – April 2, (2) September 5 – September 30, 2021

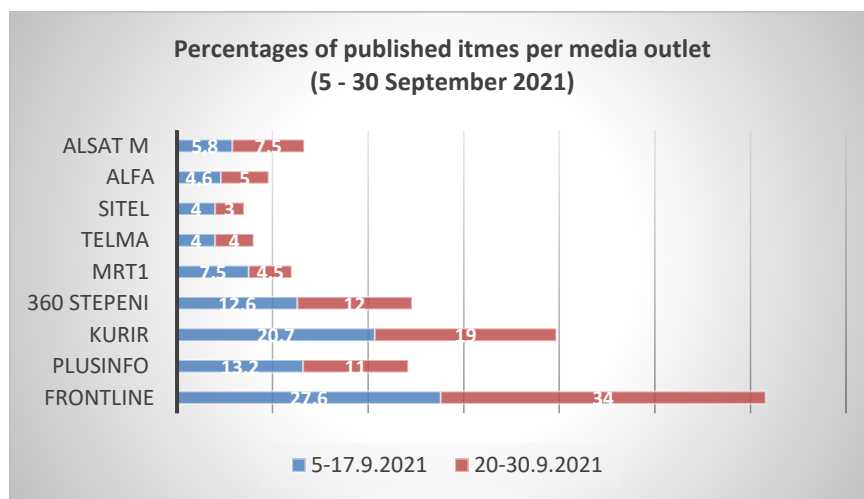
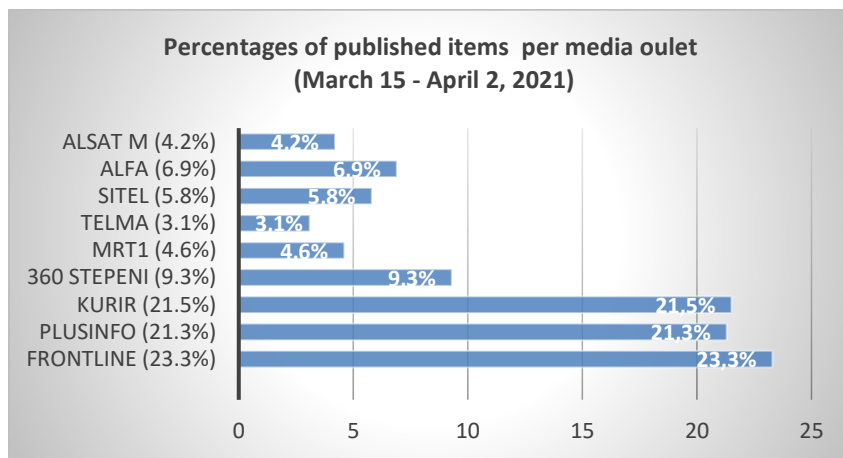
	1st Monitoring Period March 15 – April 2, 2021	2nd Monitoring Period September 5 – September 30, 2021	Total
Total number of published items	451	309 (-31.5%)	760
TV Reports	111	77 (-32%)	188
Online articles	340	232 (-31%)	572

Table 1: Breakdown of published content items in the two monitoring periods, by type of media

In the preparatory period, among the broadcasters, the largest number of news stories was broadcast by Alfa TV (31 of the total number of analysed articles), followed by Sitel TV (26), MRT1 (21), AlsatM TV (19) and Telma TV (14). As far as online media are concerned, it was Frontline.mk that led the way (105), followed by Kurir.mk (97) and Plusinfo.mk (96), while 360stepeni.mk published a total of 42 articles.

During the Census proper, it was Alsat TV that led the way with 20 stories, followed by MRT1 (19), Alfa TV (15), Telma TV (12) and Sitel TV (11). Among the online media, Frontline.mk and Kurir.mk were the most active with 94 and 62 articles, respectively, followed by 360stepeni.mk and Plusinfo.mk with 38 articles each.

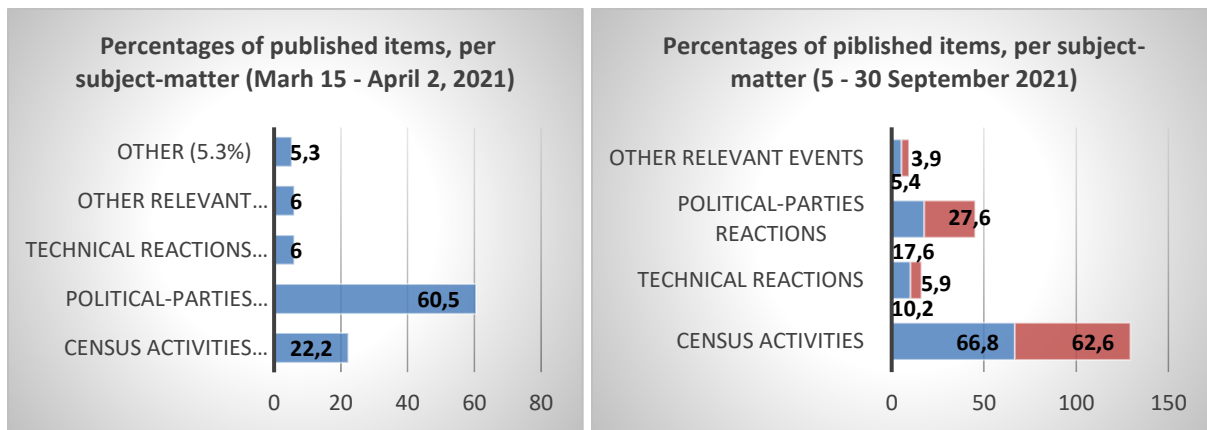
The volume of coverage should be interpreted and correlated in relation with the specific editorial approach of the given media outlet. If we correlate the number of published items to the editorial approach, we would realize that, for instance, Frontline.mk with its high volume of published articles aimed to support the campaign for greater involvement of citizens in the Census. Kurir.mk and Plusinfo.mk, on the other hand, in the preparatory period for the Census, demonstrated inclination to back the views of the opposition that the Census should be postponed, while in September 2021 they emphasized the defects of the registration process and criticized the SSO and the other competent institutions.



Graphs 3 and 4: Breakdown of shares of volume of coverage per individual media in the preparatory (3) and census-taking (4) period

4.2. Breakdown of Distribution of Published Items by Content

In the first monitoring period (March – April), the media coverage was dominated by political and party reaction, which amounted to 60.5% of the total coverage. In the September monitoring period, we registered a turnaround in terms of contents of the coverage. The reports on the actual registration came to the fore, while the share of political reactions and related contents registered a significant drop. During the Census proper, full 65% of the total number of analysed items referred to the census process and the most important information coming from the field, with the share of political and party reaction falling to just 22.6%.



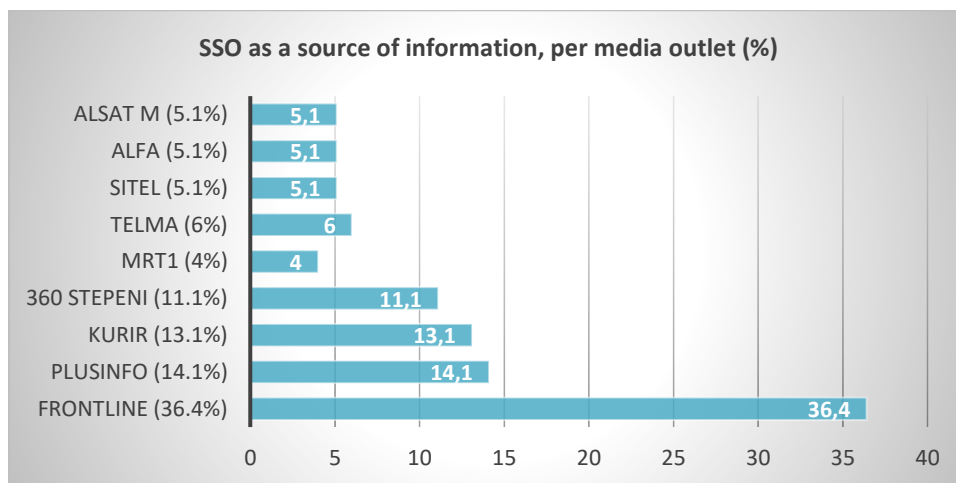
Graph 5-6: Percentages of published content items, per subject-matter for the period March 15 – April 2 (Graph 5) compared to the period September 5 – September 30 (Graph 6)

The change is due to the very context in which the political reactions and mutual accusations subsided, with the importance of the Census coming to the fore, as well as the fact that SSO served the media, on daily basis, with a wide scope of information on the registration process. A huge proportion of the published articles were produced by the MIA news agency.

One attempt at disinformation was noted in the case of reported information on the alleged preparations for a mass boycott of the Census in the last two weeks of the registration process. The attempts for wider dissemination of that particular narrative never gained momentum.

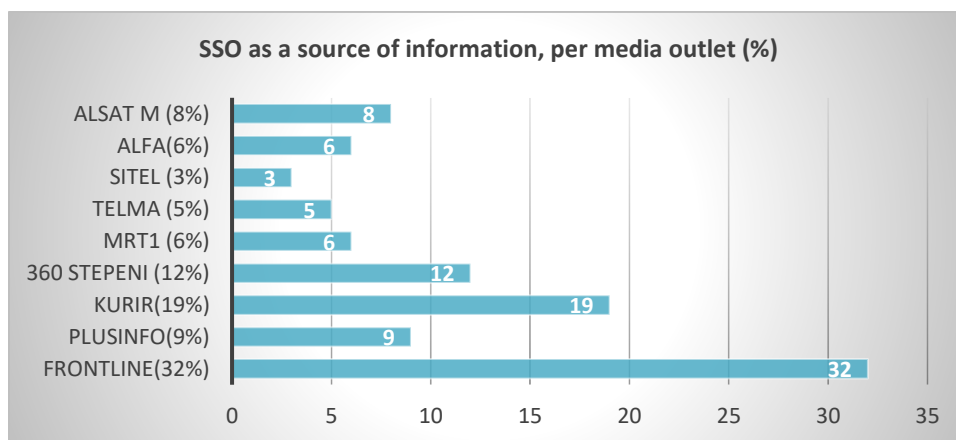
4.3 Sources of Information

In the preparatory period (March and April 2021), the SSO appeared as source of information in just 18% of the articles published by the monitored media.



Graph 7: Citing SSO as source of information, March 15 – April 2

In the September reporting period, SSO was listed as source of information in 235 of the articles (a total of 76.1% of the articles). Frontline.mk, among the online media, most frequently relied on SSO as a source of information (74.4% of all published articles on census in this media outlet), followed by Kurir.mk (70.1%), 360stepeni.mk (73.6%) and Plusinfo.mk (71%). As far as TV broadcasters are concerned, SSO was cited as the main and leading source of information by Sitel TV (in all news reports dedicated to the Census), followed by Telma TV (91.6%), MTV1 (89.5%), Alfa TV (86.6%) and Alsat TV (85%).



Graph 8: SSO cited as source of information in the coverage, per individual media outlet, September 5 - September 30

The percentage is higher with the television broadcasters because they used more sources in their daily news coverage, including SSO on regular bases. On the other hand, the online media frequently published short news citing a single source.

5. MAIN NARRATIVES OF CENSUS COVERAGE

The media coverage differed in the preparatory and the Census-proper periods, both in terms of its quantity and quality.

The preparatory period coverage was dominated by political reactions, with institutions, including SSO, being slightly side-lined. The social-political context and the spread of the pandemic has made the Census one of the most important topics, with main political entities holding opposing views on whether the Census should be taken or postponed. For that reason, the focus of the coverage, instead on the preparations for the Census, moved on the political parties and their disagreements and reactions. This political disagreement was ultimately resolved with the decision to postpone the start of the Census for September 5.

Once the Census started, the political differences slowly levelled out and the reporting framework of the media moved towards reporting from the field on the actual process of registration. Although the pro-opposition media offered frequent criticism of the government and the state institutions regarding the quality of the process, from the viewpoint of the most frequently used narratives, they clearly didn't dispute the legitimacy and the importance of the Census.

Regarding the key narratives registered by the media monitoring, the following emerged as the leading narratives:

5.1. Health and Safety Aspects of the Census

The initially scheduled period for conduct of the Census coincided with an increase of numbers of positive Covid19 cases in the country, brought to the fore the key question - will the Census be, and to what extent, safe for the citizens and the census-takers from the point of view of public health.

It lead to the development of the two key, opposed narratives: The Census is completely safe, position held by the government and the institutions directly involved in the Census, and (2) the Census presents a serious healthcare risk, narrative maintained and advocated by the opposition and a number of civic initiatives that promoted a boycott of the Census.

During the period of the field Census, the narrative of the safety aspects was increasingly used by the institutions which emphasized that the Census is now more safe than ever, while the opposition's counter-narrative about the risks it brought to the table subsided. In view of the fact that the Census takes place in the midst of the 4th wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statements

issued by SSO and the Ministry of Justice emphasized that the registration is safe, that it follows prescribed protocols and that there was no danger of further spread of the coronavirus⁵.

These variations of the narratives were reflected in the media coverage, depending on the level of their political biases and (im)partiality. Kurir.mk, for instance, in addition to carrying the reactions of the opposition political parties on the Census, published contents that aimed to spread fear and uncertainty about the Census in the context of the pandemic, such as the publication of allegations that the Census will bring about 2.400 new coronavirus infections⁶.

5.2. Is the Census proceeding successfully or not?

The second main narrative is, in fact, a double-sided narrative from two opposed positions – of the government and of the opposition – on the same subject, in this case, the question whether the Census proceeded successfully or not?

The government claimed that, in spite of certain technical difficulties and interruptions at the start, the Census proceeds forward without serious problems and at the planned registration rate. That narrative was present in the articles that used SSO or the Ministry of Justice as the main sources of information.

The main communication goal of those messages was to build confidence in the organisation and the conduct of the Census. In addition, they aimed to reduce the risk of an eventual boycott⁷, but also to counter the political attacks on the government and the state institutions. This narrative gained momentum with the emergence of the first technical problems with the application used by the census-takers⁸. SSO informed the public that, in the first two weeks of the Census, its servers were under hacker attacks, but that the Census continued successfully.

⁵ “Maricik: The Census will be safe, it is our obligation towards the state and the citizens – On the eve of the Census, the competent institutions voiced assurances that everything was ready and prepared for the enumeration of population, households and dwellings... Having in mind that it (the Census) is conducted in a midst of a pandemic, they noted that the whole process will be safe, with full adherence to the health protocols, and that there was no danger of further spread of the virus”. (360stepeni.mk, September 5, 2021).

⁶ „На Заев и Филипче не им е гајле за здравјето на граѓаните“, Куир.

⁷ The Census started this morning, and the census-takers faced no boycott or technical problem, whatsoever, in the first several hours of registration, and the Director of the State Statistical Office (SSO) Apostol Simovski expects to be able to say the same on September 30, when the statistical operation should end, 360stepeni.mk, September 5, 2021.

⁸ „Прекинат пописот на вториот ден, Симовски: Најверојатно интернетот паднал“, Alfa TV, September 6, 2021.

The media critical of the Government relied on their own counter-narrative with articles that attacked the positions and information issued by state institutions and their representatives, especially those of the SSO⁹ and the Minister of Justice:

“The Statistics Office apologizes after the unfortunate statement: It wasn’t the internet connection to blame, it was our application that didn’t work”, Kurir.mk, September 6, 2021.

“Census incidents start - Some people refuse to be registered, the state will send in negotiators”, Plusinfo.mk, September 5, 2021.

“The Population Census started in the field - will it be safe and successful?”, Alfa TV, September 5, 2021.

The media in this group focused on the question if the institutions have the capacity to respond to the challenge and emphasized that the Census and its conduct was a serious test for the government. This category of content includes the attempts to question the credibility of the Census (“Will the data be credible if we knew that the registered persons are not required to verify with their signature the data they share?”).

5.3. Politicisation and Ethnicisation of the Census

One of the key topics that influenced the development of the dominant media narratives was the Census of the diaspora, which started on March 1. Back in the Spring of 2021, the media regularly reported on the online self-registration of the diaspora, a topic that was gradually subjected to ethnically motivated interpretations and reactions. The pro-opposition media developed the narrative that “Albanian politicians were much more actively campaigning for the census of the ethnic Albanians in the diaspora” (compared to the members of the other ethnic communities, including the majority of ethnic Macedonians). The narratives that the political parties of the Albanians are more actively campaigning for registration of the diaspora were reflected on the census-taking in the country.

That narrative was commonly used in the coverage of Alfa TV¹⁰, and occasionally by other pro-opposition media outlets¹¹, attaching to the Census a prominent ethnic connotation and meaning. Kurir.mk often covered this subject matter using presentations of statements by OMD (from "Obedineta makedonska dijaspora" - United Macedonian Diaspora) criticising the

⁹ „Македонски Телеком го демантира Симовски: Нема никакви проблеми со интернетот во текот на денот“, Kurir.mk, September 6, 2021.

¹⁰ See in „После Косово Груби во дводневна посета на Албанија - таму ќе бара поддршка за пописот на дијаспората“, March 22, 2021, „Во која држава и за чија Влада работи првиот вицепремиер Артан Груби“, March 23, 2021.

¹¹ See in Plusinfo.mk, March 22, 2021, „Со Груби и Османи пописот на дијаспората се претвори во гласна политичка кампања за мобилизирање Албанци“ (illustrated with a photo of Albanian flag).

"politicisation of the Census"¹² or statements by the opposition ("VMRO-DPMNE: Zaev transformed the Census into a PR-tool for DUI"¹³).

Plusinfo.mk published several opinion and analysis pieces that focused on the topic of Albanian politicians being more successful in the lobbying in the diaspora than Prime Minister Zaev and SDSM ("The Government encourages the 'ministers of census' to push forward the party¹⁴ and ethnic agenda¹⁵"). These media outlets often carried contents and posts originally published on the social network profiles of critics of the government.

Such narratives were accompanied, during the Census taking in September, by articles reporting on alleged violations of the health protocols in the census in the areas with majority Albanian population. The reports and the criticism alleging violations of health protocols were usually carried by the pro-opposition media ("Situation with the epidemic in Tetovo remains serious – without adherence to protocols, the Census presents another risk for further spreading of the virus", Alfa TV, September 5, 2021), and were notably absent in the pro-government and the neutral media.

During the Census, the monitoring registered a number of articles dedicated to the registration of the Bulgarian minority¹⁶ ("Just over 70 citizens have declared themselves Bulgarians in the Census, one diplomat demands revocation of Bulgarian passports"¹⁷).

¹² „Although the number of registered members of the diaspora won't enter the official figure of residents of Macedonia, the Census of the diaspora is increasingly politicized, especially by Albanians who hold political or diplomatic positions and is presented as an important statistical operation pertinent to the constitutional rights of their ethnic community. The organizations and societies of Macedonians in the diaspora have intensified their involvement in inviting and calling to the emigration to take part in the Census. The United Macedonian Diaspora called on the Macedonians in Macedonia not to boycott the Census, Meto Koloski from UMD wrote on Facebook", Kurir.mk, March 22, 2021.

¹³ Kurir.mk, March 22, 2021, see at <https://kurir.mk/?p=486351>

¹⁴ "Ministers Bujar Osmani and Artan Grubi are all over the region and Europe, campaigning for self-enumeration of the Albanian diaspora. While they both deny that their calls to take part in the Census is directed only to the Albanian diaspora, the fact is that there are no information of them holding meetings with the Macedonian diaspora and their visits to Switzerland, Prishtina and Tirana we used to issue an appeal to Albanian emigration to use the option to self-enumerate", <https://plusinfo.mk/?p=351878>

¹⁵ See in Plusinfo.mk, March 22, 2021, <https://plusinfo.mk/?p=351977>

¹⁶ See in „Нова провокација на Цамбаски: Во Северна Македонија прават се за да се попишат што помалку Бугари“, Frontline.mk, September 17, 2021. Also, „Bulgarian MEP Angel Dzambaski again interprets the situation in Macedonia through an ultranationalist lens. This time, he claims that the Bulgarians were oppressed in the census taking place in our country – The registration in Macedonia started with reprisals towards those who chose to declare themselves Bulgarians. Instead of presenting ultimatums to Bulgaria, the European Union should charge Macedonia to respect human rights – Dzambaski wrote on Twitter, and tagged Prime Minister Zoran Zaev“, (Plusinfo.mk, September 7, 2021).

¹⁷ See in Frontline.mk, September 15, 2021

Also, several of the monitored media carried reports about alleged pressure on citizens from the Roma community to register as Albanians or Turks ("The Roma complain that they are registered as Albanians and Turks", Alfa TV)¹⁸. Those articles carried the claims by representatives of the citizen movement AVAJA that ethnic Roma citizens were registered as Albanians and Turks, and, allegedly, there were pressures on the Roma community. Another claim presented was that "the census forms had no option Roma man/woman to be selected, and in many municipalities the Roma weren't even asked to declare their ethnic affiliation". Apart from carrying those claims and statements, the media didn't offer any confirmation or denial of those allegations from other sources.

On the other hand, the media close to the government often published the counter-narratives stating that: "the Census is a statistical operation of public interest that shouldn't be politicized or viewed through the lens of ethnicity". This narrative was most present in the coverage of the news-site Frontline.mk, commonly in the context of using SSO as a source of information, reported statements from the campaign caravan of CIVIL NGO, or statements of representatives of the institutions. This key narrative was present in the Census coverage in the other media outlets, usually through reporting of statements of representatives of the SSO. At the very start of the Census, some state officials, for instance, President Stevo Pendarovski, appealed for depoliticisation of the Census and for political parties not to meddle. "Pendarovski pointed out that he didn't expect for political tensions to undermine the Census"¹⁹.

5.4. Boycott Related Narratives

In the second week of the Census, news of an alleged "mass boycott of the Census" appeared sporadically in the media. ("SSO satisfied, the opposition reports a mass boycott of the Census"²⁰). The political party "The Left" (Levica) and the national bloc "I won't open the door", open proponents and advocates of a boycott of the Census were usually the main source for such information. On September 20 and September 21, some media carried the claim of the Left political party that 200,000 citizens refused to be registered.

In addition to claims that "the census is not legitimate" and was an exercise of "political engineering of the government", some pro-opposition media published articles claiming that the

¹⁸ See Alfa TV report of September 27, 2021, available on link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RHRa47EX44>

¹⁹ "I don't expect that someone may undermine the results of the Census due to political tensions, but the situation wasn't like that earlier, says President Stevo Pendarovski in an interview for Radio Free Europe, asked about the start of the Census today and the possibility for the narrative that focuses on the thesis that it was a matter of counting Macedonians and Albanians to undermine the operation", (Kurir.mk, September 9, 2021)

²⁰ See the report on Alfa TV of September 20, 2021, available on link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IvkaT3gh8A>

citizens who boycott the Census won't be sanctioned in spite of the fact that the participation in the Census is a legal obligation.

“The intensifying campaigns to not open the door to census-takers may present the biggest problem. If you choose to do that, you won't be sanctioned. However, you will have to endure, as announced by the Director of the Statistical Office Apostol Simovski, the persistent census-takers who were prepared to knock on your door 1,000 times”.

5.5. Possible Prolongation of the Census Period

As the Census neared its end, the media, especially the pro-opposition outlets, increased the frequency of publication of information that SSO won't manage to register all citizens within the legally prescribed deadline, due to technical problems and hacker attacks in the first days of the Census, and that the whole operation will be prolonged (“Two days before its conclusion, the option to prolong the registration for several days is considered”²¹, “If the Census is not completed by Thursday, additional time will be sought”, “Xhaferi: There is no obstacle that should prevent us from calling an urgent session to prolong the Census, but the Government or a group of MPs need to submit a proposal to that effect”²², “The Alliance (of Albanian, ed.) and Alternativa ask for prolongation of the Census - they propose a 10-day prolongation”).

Some of the political parties that believed that the Census needs to be prolonged, and the media that carried such statements, attempted to present the position to the public that “the census failed and that is why we need the prolongation” (“Apasiev declared the Census ‘dead’ – The plan to falsify it definitely failed!”, Plusinfo, September 27, 2021).

“Two days before the end of the Census, the Government faces that fact that it will probably be faulty... Political circles consider the possibility to prolong the deadline for its conclusion and, we learn unofficially, such a proposal was already submitted. Unofficially, SSO demanded for the deadline to be prolonged to compensate for the days in which the census software crashed”²³.

“According to SSO, the Census proceeds without problems and if it ends on time, as prescribed, it will be considered a success. If not, the Statistical Office will ask for extra days... You know that we barely worked for almost five days because of hacking attacks, which meant that we were pressured by the time. If necessary, we will ask for those days to be compensated”, the State Statistical Office states”²⁴.

²¹ See on Alfa TV, September 28, 2021

²² See in Kurir.mk, September 27, 2021

²³ See on Alfa TV, September 28, 2021

²⁴ See in Kurir.mk, September 27, 2021

Another issue that was raised by those reports was the fact that the Voter Registry has 1.8 registered citizens of voting age, and the Census (by that moment) has registered 1.7 million citizens of the country, including the children and minors who have no right to vote²⁵.

ABBREVIATIONS

SSO – State Statistical Office

CID – Commission on Infectious Diseases

MH – Ministry of Health

MJ – Ministry of Justice

OMD – Obedineta makedonska dijaspora (United Macedonian Diaspora)

²⁵ An article carried by the same media outlet the next day will again question the results of the Census. The lead presented by the anchor states: “It ends the way it started, the Census in Macedonia surrounded by questions and problems”. The anchor notes that the Census was conducted without “personal signature of agreement” by the citizens. The story, relying on a critical tone, makes an attempt to challenge the census-taking process and it states that “At least 300,000 citizens of Macedonia are missing, especially in view of the claims that ‘according to some rule of statistical averages, about 20 percent of the population are children and minors’”, Alfa TV, September 30, 2021