

# TOOTHLESS WATCHDOG: HOW THE MEDIA CRISIS CHALLENGES DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

CHRISTIAN SPAHR, KAS MEDIA PROGRAM  
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## SOUTH EAST EUROPE – MEDIA

- **Crisis of trust:** 12 % of Bulgarians believe in free media (2016; 28 % of Romanians, 2015)
- **Print crashes:** run of traditional nationwide newspapers 10-20.000 (example: Bulgaria)
- **TV unchallenged:** Main source of political information for 68 % of Bulgarian population and most trusted media for 54 %
- **Financial distress:** most media = loss-makers
- **Media freedom:** Negative tendencies – only 3 SEE countries with small progress (RWB 2016)
- **Reasons:** in most countries not oppression by state, but shortcomings in media sector itself



## CHANGE OF INFORMATION CULTURE

- Internet: **no borders between consumers and producers** of information
- **Every second Bulgarian, Romanian, Serbian** uses internet (Germany 84%)
- Most internet users read news portals, some **discuss politics online**
- **Every fifth user creates content** (Bulgaria, Romania; Eurostat 2015)
- Citizens' **protests via internet** (Bulgaria 2013, BiH 2014, Macedonia 2015)
- **Independent news portals** and investigative media platforms gain popularity

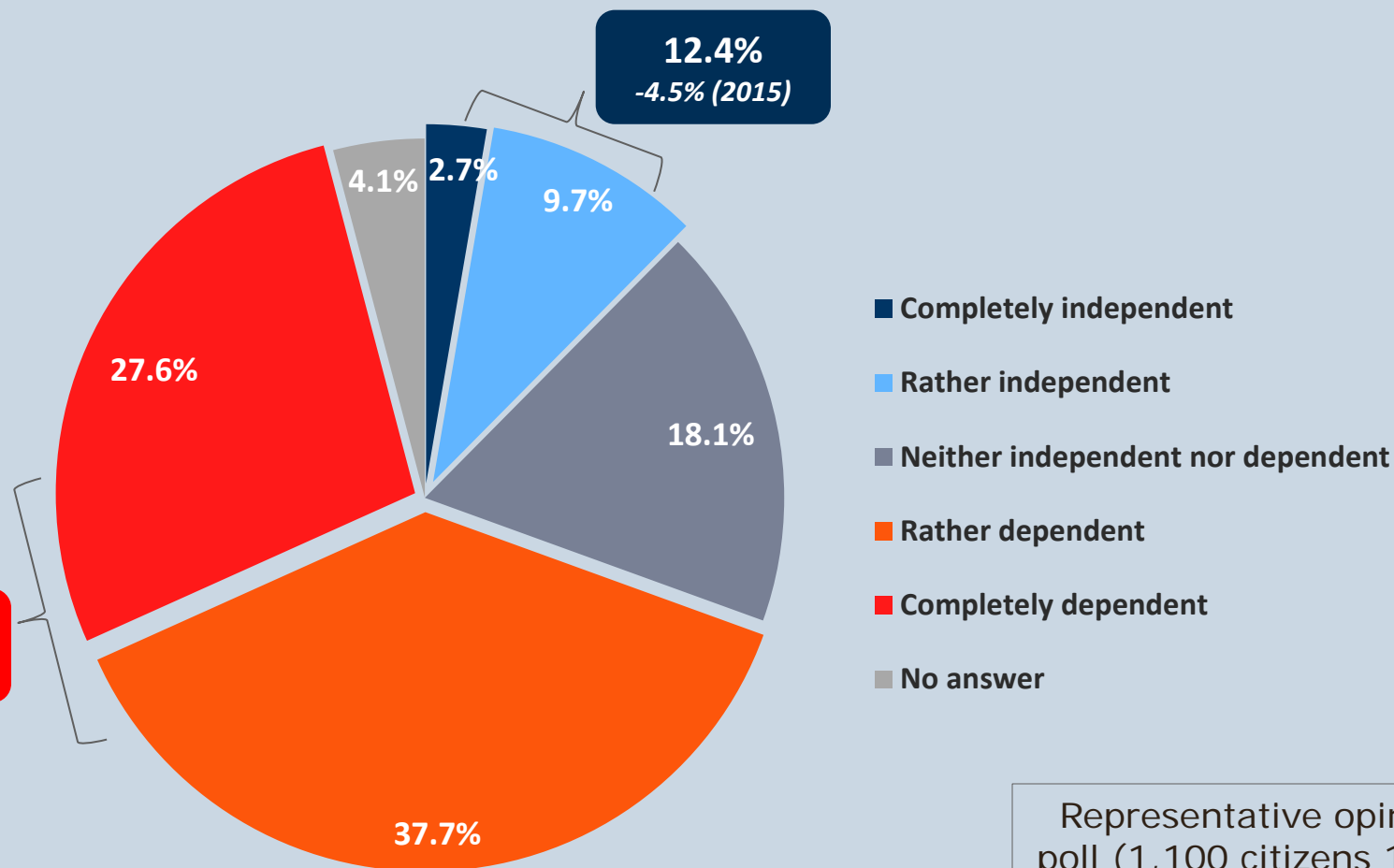
## SURVEY: TRUST IN MEDIA (BULGARIA/ROMANIA)

- Target: Population, 18+, Bulgaria and Romania
- Methods of registration: Face-to-face interview (Bulgaria), Online interview (Romania)
- Sample design: Nationally representative for urban and rural population
- Sample size: 1,000 per country
- Fieldwork: December 2015/2014
- Design of questionnaire: KAS, Market Links
- Fieldwork and data analysis: Market Links, Sofia (opinion research centre)



# Only one in eight Bulgarians thinks the media are free

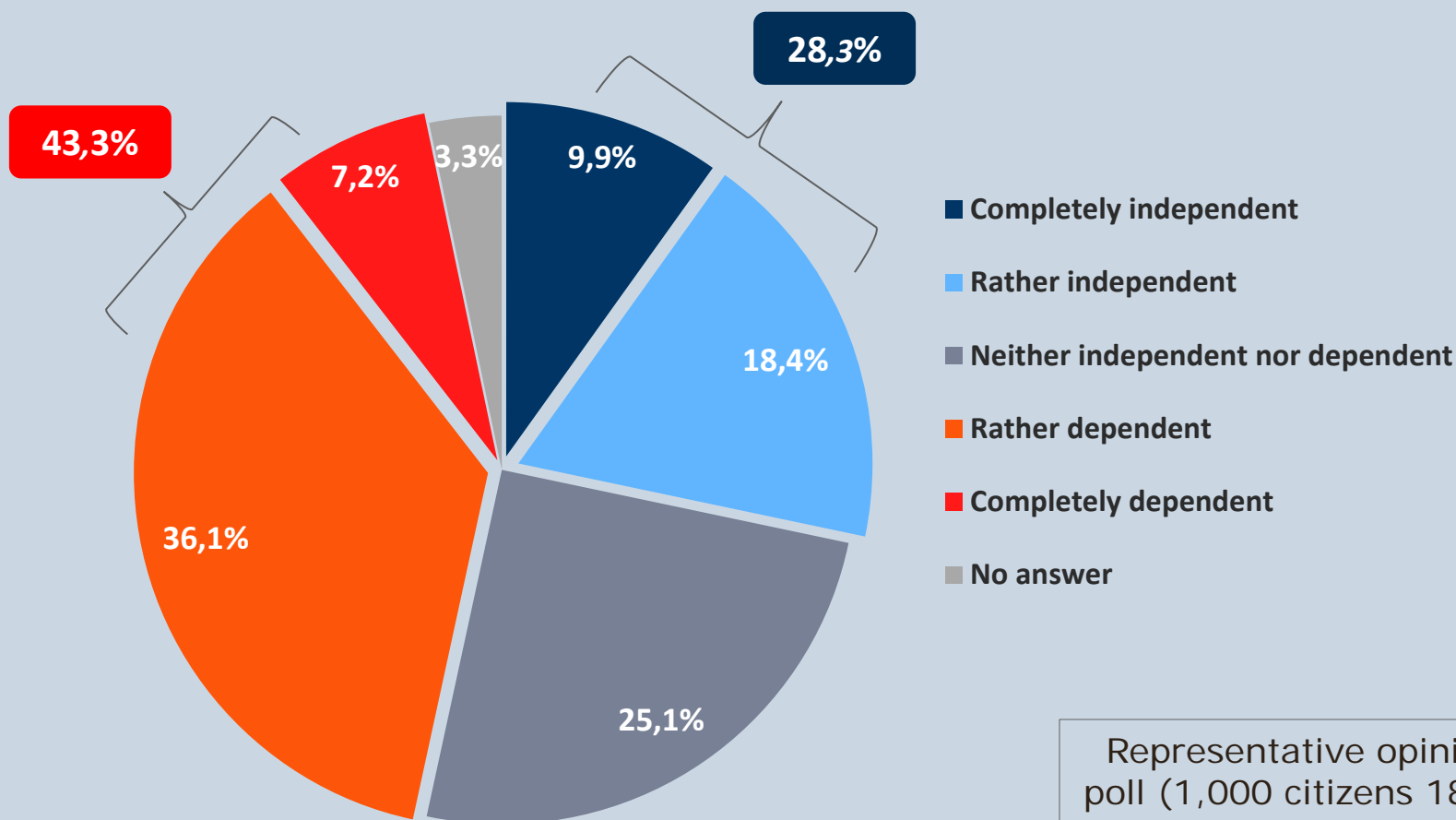
How dependent or independent are the media in the country?



Representative opinion poll (1,100 citizens 18+), December 2015, Bulgaria

## Every fourth Romanian thinks the media are free

How dependent or independent are the media in the country?



Representative opinion  
poll (1,000 citizens 18+),  
December 2014, Romania

## STUDY: PRESSURE ON MEDIA IN BULGARIA

- **Period of investigation:** January – September 2014
- **1st phase: Research** about **ownership** conditions and **revenues** of media
- **2nd phase: Interviews** with 100 **journalists** from 40 media outlets (national, regional; Print, Radio, TV, Online)
- **3rd phase: Interviews** with 17 **media owners** and media managers
- **Authors** of the study: Dr. Orlin Spassov (Sofia University) and Krum Blagov (“Reporter” foundation, BG)





## KEY RESULTS (BULGARIA)

- 52 percent of journalists say that **politicians exert pressure** on their work.
- Every third bewails **pressure from media owners and advertisers**.
- **Internal censorship**: 30 percent of journalists state that in their media outlet, reporting about **certain topics, persons or companies** is not possible or only with a determined tendency.
- **Every fourth journalist** indicates that **texts** or other journalistic materials of his/hers **have been stopped**.
- Deficient **framework conditions**:
  - lack of press code (§) – no legal definition of relation journalist-management
  - collective labour agreements non-existent or not binding for most contracts
  - weak self-regulation
  - lack of solidarity and “spirit of change” within the profession



## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE AUTHORS

- **Ownership** (in BG especially of printed media) has to become **more transparent** by law
- Political debate about **limitation** of **ownership concentration** in media sectors (TV, Print, ...)
- **Government** as biggest advertiser has to **disclose cash flows**
- **Obligation to label paid content** (text ads) in printed media
- **Equal access** of media outlets to **distribution** and to government information to be ensured



## MORE APPROACHES FOR CHANGE

- **Influence on politicians** in transition countries during EU membership process (by EU institutions, governments, NGOs)
- **Schengen and EU subsidies** as a lever
- Advancement of **investigative journalism** (training, sponsorship, awards)
- **Further education**: Media ethics, EU topics
- Enhancement of **public debate**: media business, journalistic education, media law / self regulation
- Enhancement of both global **strategic communication** and **ethics in political PR**
- New **information platforms** for citizens



## CONTACT

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