



**Association for the Advancement of Journalistic Practices  
Innovative Media**

**Annual Report for 2022**

**Covering the program activities  
between**

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**February 2023  
Skopje, North Macedonia**



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## Innovative Media Mission and Vision

### Vision

The Association for the Advancement of Journalistic Practices Innovative Media envisions a society in which engaged and aware journalists actively use innovative tools to exercise their duties, a society in which they are cautious about influencing and demanding accountability from the authorities, while ensuring democratic, accountable and prepared governance.

### Mission to Achieve the Vision

Innovative Media protects, promotes and advances professional standards in the media by building capacities of journalists and strengthens the awareness and capacity of young journalists for them to take on the best possible role as innovative journalists respecting ethical norms and are activists for democracy.

### Program areas

Innovative Media strengthens the awareness and capacity of citizens and civil society to assume their fullest possible role as activists for democracy, while supporting government to fulfil its democratic role in serving society. Innovative Media work is focused within three main program areas:

1. Combating disinformation;
2. Upholding democratic values through watchdog journalism;
3. Advancing professional journalism standards.

### Basic Information

Registration data	Contact information
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## Executive Summary

The Association for the Advancement of Journalistic Practices **Innovative Media – Skopje** was established in 2019 in Skopje, North Macedonia by a group of journalists and civil society. Over the years, it has established a diverse portfolio of collaborations, projects and capacities related to covering digital transformation issues and usage of digital tools in journalistic work. As a result, it has formed lasting partnerships with other civil society organizations, donors and media outlets.

Innovative Media projects conducted during 2022, primarily provided support for the news portal Portalb.mk, with an aim to provide the Albanian speaking population of North Macedonia and abroad with accurate and reliable information, through news and analysis production, with a focus on the reform process of European Union (EU) accession and the benefits and responsibilities resulting from the NATO membership. Special attention was also given to issues related to the Western Balkan Digital agenda initiated by the EU in cooperation with Western Balkan countries and covers various aspects of the digital transformation. By producing news relevant to all citizens regardless of their ethnic origin, Portalb.mk contributes to the strengthening of inter-ethnic relations and establishing social cohesion in Macedonia. Also, it supported some of production of the Macedonian news Agency Meta.mk, specifically the bilingually products that were mutually created and produced with Portalb.mk.



[Portalb.mk](https://portalb.mk)

In particular, the media outlets supported by Innovative Media provided a timely response to the growing volume of disinformation preceding and following the outbreak of the pandemic as well as the political processes in the country that exacerbated the situation with the disinformation often time. The news portal Portalb.mk cooperated closely with the fact-checking service Truthmeter.mk on production and dissemination of debunking articles on the topic of COVID-19 and vaccines making them available to the Albanian language speaking audiences in North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and the diaspora. This committed effort contributed significantly to raising awareness among the general public about the spreading of dangerous disinformation, particularly on social media.

In 2022 Innovative Media received support from one key donor, enabling partnerships contributing to increasing the scope and quality of its work – the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) from Washington, DC, USA, the donor of the project “Promoting Credible and Reliable Reporting in Albanian Language - Portalb.mk”.

Below is an overview of the projects Innovative Media has worked on in 2022 and of the highlights of some of the achievements.

## Innovative Media Activities and Projects in 2022

Innovative Media conducted a range of activities in 2022 in order to promote the crucial role of free and professional media in providing knowledge and in giving voice to citizens of Republic of North Macedonia in general, and in particular the primary audience of Portalb.mk - the ethnic Albanian community from the country and the region, as basic condition for empowering citizens to meaningfully participate in democratic processes.

The news portal Portalb.mk was developed in April 2012, and over the years grew into one of the leading and most credible sources of information in Albanian language from Macedonia. Its dedication to strict implementation of journalistic standards makes Portalb the attention to audience. According to research by rating agency Gemius, Portalb is the most influential Albanian-language online media outlet in Macedonia, in terms of audience reception, and its original production also serves as a beacon of professional journalism and increases the pluralism in this segment of the media scene in Macedonia and the region.

In a very segregated media environment, Innovative Media, through its main channel of activities - Portalb contributes to increasing the social cohesion by providing an important linguistic bridge towards the Albanian-speaking communities by reporting on issues affecting citizens of all ethnicities in the country and translating contents produced in Macedonian. Its reputation as a relevant and serious source of information is compounded by high popularity thanks to innovative use of digital technologies in the media. It introduced consistent use of live video streaming via social networks which further increased its popularity.

The impact of Portalb.mk work also transcended the language barriers through direct cooperation and content sharing with the News Agency Meta.mk, operating in Macedonian, other Balkan languages and English, and the only fact-checking service in North Macedonia the Truthmeter.mk, producing content in Macedonian, Albanian and English. This cooperation served as nexus of a wider syndication network of online media from North Macedonia that included local portals from all eight planning regions, disseminating the articles focused on accountability of public officials and debunking disinformation, related to COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and other important societal issues.

Some of the highlights of the Innovative Media work during 2022 included:

- On the occasion of [celebrating 10 years of existence of Portalb.mk](#) a public debate was organized in Tetovo Southeast European University. 8 participants (Portalb columnists, journalists and two young activists) had the opportunity to voice their concerns and to portray their vision of North Macedonia. The panelists spoke about EU integration, reforms, the environment, corruption, gender issues and youth perspectives. On the occasion, Portalb received [a letter of support](#) from the Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski, as well as from several foreign ambassadors, media colleagues, NGO-s in the country emphasizing the good impact of Portalb in the community during a whole decade. Also, a [group of artists](#) praised our team's work.

- In 2022, Portalb.mk published an investigative story about how the [Offices for Citizens' Contact with MP-s](#) function and found out that some of them are dysfunctional. The link of the story: [link1](#). Portalb.mk visited four offices, while in one of these, namely in Karposh, the reporter discovered that the building is located on the bridge where the elevators were broken, while the electric stairs did not work. This office, which should serve as contact point for all citizens of the Municipality of Karposh with the MPs of the area, is not accessible for people with disabilities. Due to the fact that our reporters often act as activists, Portalb [submitted a claim](#) to the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (KPMD). Read: [link2](#). Three months after the publication the story, the KPMD [published a decision](#) that the Municipality of Karposh has committed continuous discrimination against citizens with disabilities, residents of this municipality, at the same time violating the State Constitution. KPMD has given the Municipality of Karposh two recommendations with concrete deadlines to enable free access to citizens with obstacles, as guaranteed by the Constitution, or otherwise it will initiate criminal proceedings in court. Read: [link3](#).
- Three months after Portalb.mk [investigative story](#) broke regarding the lawsuits of hundreds of soldiers against the state of North Macedonia claiming that the state does not pay them supplements in wages for work at night (reported in the previous Narrative Report November 21 – February 22) after several meetings, the Minister of Defense and the soldiers [reached an agreement](#). The story was republished by at least 5 other media on Albanian and Macedonian language ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)) and the minister Slavjanka Petrovska spoke about this issue in a show called [ClickPlus](#) on TV 21.
- Portalb.mk watchdog work continued to exert pressure on public authorities to address relevant issues, in particular those affecting **young people** from the Generation Z through the CTRL+Z section of the website. The media outlets published [articles](#) and a videos ([Shortcut E36](#)) in Albanian and and Macedonian language about a young 13 year old mathematical genius from Skopje, Ylli Morina. This story went viral and was republished by many other media in both languages. After meeting with the Minister of Education, [Jeton Shaqiri](#) and the President of the Republic, [Stevo Pendarovski](#) he received a [full scholarship](#) with an international school stationed in Skopje, North Macedonia. Ylli Morina publicly [thanked our media](#) for covering his story.
- In 2022, due to the fact that Portalb.mk is recognized as the most professional portal in Albanian language, the Office of European Union in Skopje asked Portalb republish in Albanian language the columns of High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrel. Also, the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Skopje contacted Portalb asking from us to republish in Albanian language the columns of the British Prime Minister, Liz Truss. Afterwards the link of Portalb [was shared on their official Facebook page](#).
- In 2022, Innovative Media was accepted as a member of the [Media Literacy Network in North Macedonia](#).

## Key projects in 2022

<p><b>Promoting Credible and Reliable Reporting in Albanian Language - Portalb.mk</b></p> <p>Project objectives included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide independent news and non-biased public interest information on political and economic issues in Albanian language.</li> <li>• To provide citizens with information and explanatory content about NATO's support to North Macedonia's security challenges.</li> <li>• To educate and inform the citizens about the EU accession process, esp. about the fulfilment of the required reforms (EU Acquis).</li> <li>• To provide a platform for open public debate on important societal issues.</li> <li>• To increase news outreach by fostering content exchange and translation from Macedonian news portals, thus, contributing to social cohesion and relaxing tensed interethnic relations.</li> </ul> <p>Project results included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased citizen awareness of situation in North Macedonia in particular about political issues related to EU accession and NATO membership, accountability and transparency.</li> <li>• Increased usage of the fact-based journalistic contents by independent media, civil society, pro-democracy institutions and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Diminishing the gap between Macedonian and Albanian reporting thus contributing in decreasing the tendency for interethnic divides.</li> <li>• Counter the disinformation related to the EU accession and NATO membership of North Macedonia and the Western Balkans, and creating freely accessible public record, documenting the ongoing political developments.</li> </ul>	<p>Implementation period: 01.07.2020 – 30.06.2022</p> <p>Geographical scope: North Macedonia</p> <p>Donor: National Endowment for Democracy (NED)</p>
<p><b>Combating Disinformation through Fact-Checking and Media Literacy</b></p> <p>Through mainstreaming this activity in all aspects of its work, Innovative Media provides support for production and dissemination of fact-checking, anti-disinformation content of Portalb.mk in close cooperation with the fact-checking service Truthmeter.mk and News Agency Meta.mk, serving as a nexus of network of cooperation encompassing local online media outlets from North Macedonia. The produced content includes informative articles (news and analysis) as well as educative content aimed at enhancing media literacy and critical thinking in Albanian language, addressing the needs of audiences in North Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania, as well as ethnic Albanian diaspora.</p> <p>Key objectives of this work include:</p>	<p>Implementation period: 01.01.2021 – 31.12.2022</p> <p>Geographical scope: North Macedonia</p> <p>Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Truthmeter.mk</li> <li>- Meta.mk News Agency</li> </ul>





<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To increase awareness and knowledge of decision-makers and the general public about the nature and effect of foreign malign propaganda and disinformation in North Macedonia</li> <li>• To strengthen the capacities of individual journalists and media outlets for fact-based watchdog journalism focused on exposing malign influences.</li> <li>• Public Outreach and Advocacy for increased public debate and demand for constructive policy measures</li> </ul> <p>As a result, the participating partners have created wide array of resources detailing the nature and effect of foreign malign propaganda and disinformation in North Macedonia and the region, as well as conducted watchdog journalism and research supporting advocacy actions increase policy makers' engagement.</p>	
<p><b>Credible News for Empowered Youth</b></p> <p>The project aims to increase youth engagement in public life empowering them to demand resolution of policy issues that affect their lives. It broadcasts the weekly news show for youth Shortcut – which summarizes the most important events of the week in a format attractive and of interest to youth. In this way it engages youth in being more informed about matters that affect them directly, while also providing a platform for them to engage and directly seek accountability from public officials. Its content is widely read and disseminated and it is becoming an important initiative trusted and used by youth.</p> <p>Project objectives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth born after '95 – Gen-Z are informed by media and empowered to voice their concerns and interests and engage in public issues</li> <li>• Mainstream media are reflecting the views of Gen-Z in project related themes</li> <li>• Rise of the number of the new youth initiatives voicing concerns reported in the media</li> </ul> <p>Project results include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased availability of watchdog reporting about priority issues.</li> <li>• Increased level of public awareness about democratic values through practical application of professional journalism standards and critical thinking.</li> <li>• Increased media pluralism in North Macedonia through production of news (multimedia content) and networking with media for amplified dissemination of the created content.</li> </ul>	<p>Period 01.06.2021 – 31.03.2022</p> <p>Geographical scope: North Macedonia</p> <p>Partners: - Meta.mk News Agency</p> <p>Donor: UK Embassy in Skopje</p>
<p><b>Promoting the Accountability and Transparency of Public Reforms</b></p> <p>The project aims to promote the accountability of public officials and institutions on important policy areas with a particular focus on public administration, judicial system – rule of law, fundamental rights, and freedom of expression.</p> <p>Innovative Media, produces various media content – including fact-checking and analytical articles addressing issues raised in European Commission reports on the progress of Republic of North Macedonia in implementation of reforms needed to join the European Union, explaining the issues and</p>	<p>Period 01.07.2021-30.06.2022</p> <p>Geographical scope: North Macedonia</p> <p>Partners: - Truthmeter.mk - Meta.mk</p> <p>Local media network:</p>

<p>institutional responsibilities for the public by relating responsibilities for increasing quality of life of the citizens. In addition, quarterly monitoring reports following a pre-defined methodology, assess and highlight the degree to which promises, and initiated policies were put to practice. Innovative Media developed the capacities of partner local media to conduct fact checking and sustain the project's objectives. At the same time, local partners were engaged in wide dissemination of project content. Established Rapid Communication System (RCS) enables speedy communication between journalists and representatives of state institutions via messaging apps to debunk disinformation related to their competences, as well as increased promotion of the verified information via public Viber group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apla.mk</li> <li>- Drnka.mk</li> <li>- Kumanovonews.mk</li> <li>- Flaka.com.mk</li> </ul> <p>Donor: National Endowment for Democracy - NED</p>
<p><b>Increasing Civic Engagement in the Digital Agenda - ICEDA</b></p> <p>Innovative Media provided media support for the implementation of the ICEDA project, through daily journalistic coverage of project activities, watchdog and investigative reporting. During 2022 the project was in its third (last) year of implementation, striving towards increasing the engagement of CSOs in shaping and implementing the Digital Agenda in the Western Balkans by providing multiple networking and capacity building opportunities.</p> <p>In 2022 the ICEDA network has been joined by <a href="#">15</a> more CSOs/ sub-grantees in partnership with 19 media, working on advocating on specific issues related to the Digital Agenda in their respective countries. The 20 CSOs from the first cycle of the ICEDA Grants Scheme have continued assisting the community in using specific public e-services and increasing their digital literacy through a variety of activities within their 15 e-government support centers, managing to support around 30.000 citizens.</p> <p>In two years the project has provided more than 40 capacity building opportunities for civil servants, CSOs, media workers other stakeholders. The ICEDA network has also produced several <a href="#">educational and informative e-content pieces</a> (investigative articles, videos, animations, infographics and visualizations, Digital Agenda Observatory Country reports and Cumulative report on Digital Agenda advancement, etc.).</p>	<p>Period: 01.01.2020 – 31.12.2022</p> <p>Geographical scope: North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina</p> <p>Partners: Center for Democratic Transition, Montenegro Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability, Serbia, e-Governance Academy Estonia, Levizja Mjaft! (Albania), NGO 35 mm, Montenegro, Open Data Kosovo (Kosovo) Donor: European Union</p>
<p><b>Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub: Exposing Malign Influences through Watchdog Journalism</b></p> <p>The main goal of the project is exposing foreign malign influence in Western Balkans by debunking and mapping the flow of disinformation, misinformation and propaganda affecting development of democracy, originating from external actors trough the region. Project activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of regional early-warning data-driven infrastructure that will serve to prevent harmful impact in the region from disinformation campaigns originating from foreign actors.</li> <li>• Watchdog journalism – production of high-quality journalistic contents in the primary formats of debunking articles, in-depth stories and investigative reporting stories.</li> </ul>	<p>Period: 01.11. 2021 – 30.04.2025</p> <p>Geographical scope: North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina</p> <p>Project lead: Partners: ISAC – International and Security Affairs Centre, Serbia</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research focused on mapping, documenting and explaining the venues of malign foreign influence in each country and the WB region as whole. Data collection and analysis resulting in creation of data-driven early warning infrastructure centered around the knowledge hub (database).</li> <li>• Public outreach and Advocacy – engagement of general audiences and increasing awareness via promotional campaign for public education and social media outreach; contributing to policy change via advocacy consultations and public events gathering relevant stakeholders to increase their awareness and engagement in the public debate on malign foreign influences.</li> </ul>	<p>Zašto ne (Why Not), Bosnia and Herzegovina Center for Democratic Transition, Montenegro Faktoje, Albania Sbunker, Kosovo</p> <p>Donor: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands</p>
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## Cooperation with/in Various Networks

During 2022, Innovative Media participated in the work of the following networks and coalitions:

<p><b>Media Literacy Network - MLN</b> Throughout 2022 Portalb.mk became a member of the Media Literacy Network, established in North Macedonia in 2017 and administered by the state regulatory body in charge of media literacy the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. Also, Innovative Media through Portalb.mk participated in the activities of the MLN-organized <b>Media Literacy Days</b> in October and November of 2022.</p>	 <p><a href="http://mediumskapismenost.mk">mediumskapismenost.mk</a></p>
<p><b>Global Voices in Albanian</b> Innovative Media contributes to translation and dissemination of the news of the <a href="#">Albanian</a> version of the website of the international, multilingual, primarily volunteer community of writers, translators, academics, and human rights activists <a href="#">Global Voices Online</a>. Global Voices members include over 1200 citizen journalists, analysts, online media experts and translators, reporting from 167 countries and translating into up to 30 languages.</p>	 <p><a href="http://sq.globalvoicesonline.org">sq.globalvoicesonline.org</a></p>
<p><b>ACTION SEE - Accountability, Technology and Institutional Openness Network in South-East Europe</b> Through reporting via Portalb.mk and participation of Innovative Media team members in events organized by ACTION SEE network, IM increased visibility of the projects of this network that enables cooperation between leading digital transparency organizations from North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania. Its members use new technologies for empowering citizens and increasing public institutions' accountability via fact-checking projects, annual POINT conferences on new technologies and political accountability, and developing the regional Index of Transparency.</p>	 <p><a href="http://www.actionsee.org">www.actionsee.org</a></p>

<p><b>Anti-Disinformation Network for the Balkans (AND-Balkans)</b></p> <p>Innovative Media is among the founding members of this network that serves as the basis of a cooperation between civil society organizations, media outlets, educational institutions and all other relevant stakeholders with a goal of forming a wide front on countering disinformation through affirmation of the highest standards of fact-checking and professional journalism, as well as promoting media literacy &amp; critical thinking based on the <a href="#">Declaration that re-affirms the freedom of expression in its various forms</a>.</p> <p>ADN-Balkans developed gradually through bilateral and multilateral cooperation of its founding members, and from November 2021 it provided infrastructure for Metamorphosis-led project Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub: Exposing Malign Influences through Data-Driven Watchdog Journalism in the six countries of the region, with support of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.</p>	<p><a href="http://antidisinfo.net">antidisinfo.net</a></p>
<p>Other cooperation's and public appearances in 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Editor in Chief, Elida Zylbeari was the only Albanian journalist <a href="#">who attended a meeting with the US Ambassador, Kate Byrnes</a> prior to the Summit For Democracy. Zylbeari attended two other meetings with the EU Ambassador in Macedonia, David Geere and the new French Ambassador in Macedonia, Cyrille Baumgartner.</li> <li>• Zylbeari's output was published in BIRN's big <a href="#">Platform B research</a> about trends, opportunities and obstacles female journalists in the Balkans come across.</li> </ul> <p>Zylbeari was a panelist in several public events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Presenting</a> at the <a href="#">Platform B research</a> of BIRN</li> <li>• <a href="#">Debate on democracy and disinformation</a>, organized by NGO Civil</li> <li>• <a href="#">E-Society</a>, organized by Foundation Metamorphosis</li> <li>• <a href="#">The youth debate</a>, organized by Meta.mk</li> <li>• <a href="#">Panelist at POINT 10</a>: The rise of the Fact-checking Movement, organized by NGO Zasto Ne in Sarajevo.</li> <li>• Panelist at the conference "<a href="#">Dealing with Disinformation in the Republic of North Macedonia</a>" organized by Foundation Metamorphosis.</li> <li>• Guest speaker on two national TV's debates concerning media and disinformation: "<a href="#">Click Plus</a>" on TV 21 and "<a href="#">Otvoreno</a>" on TV 24.</li> <li>• Statements regarding the media freedom situation for the magazine <a href="#">Globus Magazin</a> and the newspaper <a href="#">Sloboden Pecat</a>.</li> <li>• Interviews concerning the working process of Portalb.mk on the <a href="#">Public Broadcaster MTV</a> and for the NGO <a href="#">Institute for Leadership and Public Policy</a>.</li> <li>• Guest speaker in a <a href="#">debate show on TV 24 Vesti</a>, sharing her expertise on the topic "Quality journalism and the fight</li> </ul>	

against fake news as a prerequisite for membership in the European Union”.

- Representing Portalb.mk as the only Albanian professional online media, Zylbeari had an appearance in the [Campaign for Professional Investigating - Guidelines for Ethical Reporting of Online Media](#) prepared by the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) in cooperation with the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia.
- Also, she was the only Albanian (from the online media) invited to brief Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, about the media situation in North Macedonia, before [her visit to Skopje](#).
- Zylbeari was one [of the 8 participants](#) (local youth organizations, project implementers and youth activists) who were invited to share their insights with the British Ambassador Matthew Lawson in Skopje, while marking the National Youth Day.
- Zylbeari was invited to participate at [The EU-Western Balkans Media Conference 2022](#), in Tirana, Albania, on 10-11 November 2022.
- Zylbeari gave a brief [interview for the online platform CIVIL](#), sharing her insights about the issue of disinformation in North Macedonia and the need for media literacy.

## The Team of Innovative Media

Elida Zylbeari – Experienced journalist and editor. She holds a master’s degree on Diplomacy and bachelor’s degree in Communication sciences from SEE University in North Macedonia. Since 2012 she is the Editor in chief of the Albanian news portal [www.Portalb.mk](http://www.Portalb.mk).

Suad Bajrami – BA in Albanian language and literature, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University Skopje. He works as a journalist for the media projects. Since 2015, he’s been a working as journalist for Portalb.mk.

Fisnik Xhelili – Graduated in Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana. He works as a journalist for the media projects. Since 2021, he’s been a working as journalist for Portalb.mk.

Shefkije Alasani – Graduated in Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana. She works as a journalist for the media projects. Since 2019, he’s been working as journalist for Portalb.mk.

Teuta Buçi – Graduated journalist at the State University of Tetovo. Works as a journalist in media projects. Since 2019, she’s been a working as journalist for Portalb.mk. She has previously worked in several other media.

Faton Curi – Graduate Professor of Albanian Language and Literature at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius – Skopje. Works as a journalist in media projects. Since 2019, he’s been a working as journalist for Portalb.mk.

Naile Dauti – Graduated journalist at the State University of Tetovo. Works as a journalist in media projects. Since 2020, she’s been a working as journalist for Portalb.mk. She has previously worked in several other media.