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Martin Bull, Ph.D.
Editor
Journal of Contemporary European Studies
M.J.Bull@salford.ac.uk

Dear Professor Bull:

I am writing to request the retraction of an article in the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* on the basis of suspected data fabrication. The article is:

Teresa Cierco. “[Civil Society in Macedonia’s Democratization Process.](#)” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 21.2 (2013): 202–217.

The 2013 article claims to be based in part on fieldwork interviews in Skopje in February 2011. I believe the evidence below shows that all the fieldwork interviews that form the basis of this article either (1) never occurred or (2) did not occur as described. On either account, the academic reliability of the article is vitiated, and retraction is warranted to protect the integrity of body of published research.

The quotations attributed to fieldwork interviews in the 2013 article conducted by Prof. Cierco correspond verbatim or near-verbatim to non-fieldwork sentences published in a 2011 European Union study. As the sentences appear in that source work, however, they are not presented as interview data but merely as scholarly analysis. Prof. Cierco has not only apparently fashioned fieldwork quotations from the text of the study, but she appears to have plagiarized the surrounding discussion. In addition to suspected data fraud there is suspected academic plagiarism.

I am aware that earlier this year the journal issued a lengthy correction for the same article.¹ My suspected data fraud concerns remain principally unaffected by the 2019 published correction, however.

¹ 2019. “[Correction.](#)” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 27 (1): iii–xii.

The evidence is presented in two tables below. The text from Prof. Cierco’s 2013 article is shown in the left column and the EU source text is revealed in the middle column. Overlap between the two is highlighted, and the interview quotations are indicated with single underlining in both columns. The right column accounts for the 2019 correction.

Case 1

| Cierco 2013c: 211 | TACSO 2011: 15 ² | Cierco 2019 |
|--|---|---------------------|
| <p>However, as a representative of a CSO in Macedonia stated: ‘There has not been any progress in <u>establishing effective dialogue with civil society</u> regarding <u>policy making particularly in the preparation of the state budget</u>, or in <u>improving financial support for CSOs from public funds</u>.⁶ Without sufficient autonomy, the Unit cannot take proactive measures towards implementing the strategy or in establishing direct communication with civil society (MCIC 2011, 13). The implementation of the strategy is perceived to proceed more quickly when assisted by external finance or when an action is linked to the process of European integration—either in connection with the establishment of European standards or the convergence of Macedonian law to the Acquis Communautaire.</p> <p>⁶ Interview conducted by the author with a representative of a CSO in Macedonia. Skopje, February 2011.</p> | <p>Areas where no advancement was achieved are: <u>establishing effective dialogue with civil society</u> and CSOs’ participation in <u>policy making</u>, <u>particularly in the preparation of the state budget</u>; <u>improving the financial support of CSOs from public funds</u> and development of CSOs in rural areas. Implementation of the Strategy is perceived to proceed quicker when assisted by external finance or when an action is linked to the process of European integration – either in connection with the establishment of European standards or the convergence of Macedonian law to the Acquis Communautaire.</p> | [No change to text] |

Case 2

| Cierco 2013c: 211 | TACSO 2011: 10–11 ³ | Cierco 2019: ix |
|--|--|---|
| <p>In 2007 a Code of Good Practices for the financial support by government of citizens’ associations and foundations was adopted. This set basic criteria that were to be fulfilled by CSOs in order to receive state funding. Nevertheless, since this is not an obligatory act for state bodies, government institutions rarely allocate support to CSOs in a transparent manner according to clear and equitable criteria. Very often funds are allocated to arbitrarily pre-selected beneficiary organizations, and only a very few state institutions distribute funds through open calls to tender. As a representative of a Macedonia CSO stated: ‘<u>What is still missing in the process is monitoring of the project’s implementation and evaluation of the results</u>.’⁷ In addition, many CSOs still claim that political parties and official bodies affiliated to CSOs have significant influence on the decisions.</p> <p>⁷ Interview conducted by the author with a representative of a CSO in Macedonia. Skopje, February 2011.</p> | <p>In 2007 a Code of Good Practices for the financial support by government of citizens associations and foundations was adopted and set following: basic criteria that should be fulfilled by CSOs in order to receive state funding [...]. However, Code of Good Practices is not obligatory act for state bodies, thus government institutions rarely allocate support to CSOs in a transparent manner according to clear and equitable criteria. Very often funds are allocated to arbitrarily pre-selected beneficiary organisations and only a very few state institutions distribute funds through open calls to tender. [...] However, <u>what is still missing in the process is monitoring of the projects implementation and evaluation of the results</u>. In addition, many CSOs still claim that political parties and affiliation of CSOs with the authorities have significant influence to the decisions.</p> | <p>‘it still acks the <u>monitorization of the project’s implementation and evaluation of its results</u>’.</p> |

² TACSO. 2011. *Needs assessment Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Final report*. October 2011. Skopje (http://tacso.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/mk_nar_sep2011.pdf)

³ TACSO. 2011. *Needs assessment Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Final report*. October 2011. Skopje (http://tacso.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/mk_nar_sep2011.pdf)

What is attributed in Case 1 and Case 2 to “a representative of a CSO in Macedonia” in the body of the article and again in footnotes are simply sentences already published in the 2011 EU document. In the original context in the EU document, the words are simply scholarly analysis and are not presented as any kind of fieldwork. Furthermore, all the highlighted text appears to be apparent plagiarism from the same EU document. The 2019 correction does not solve these problems; in fact the slight modification made to the fieldwork quotation displayed for Case 2 suggests that Prof. Cierco is still vouching for the integrity of her fieldwork interview quotations.

It appears that Prof. Cierco’s putative fieldwork interview quotations are simply sentences extracted from the 2011 European Union document. In light of the evidence presented in the tables above, I ask you to consider whether the conditions of academic data fraud have been met. I ask further that the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* publish a statement of retraction for Prof. Cierco’s article, and that the reason of data fraud be specified in the statement of retraction.

I make my request in light of Taylor and Francis’s statement on [Publication Ethics](#) concerning data fraud and plagiarism.

While I understand that this is a delicate matter, I am convinced that publication integrity and the high reputation of the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* in the world of learning require a correction of the scholarly record.

I should mention that I have no relationship with Prof. Cierco; I have never met, seen, or corresponded with her. There is nothing personal in my request. One of my research interests is plagiarism and publishing integrity. I have requested that other articles by Prof. Cierco, in addition to this article, be retracted for suspected plagiarism and suspected data fabrication.

Thank you for considering this request. If you could kindly acknowledge that this request has been received, I would be grateful.

Respectfully,



Michael V. Dougherty, Ph.D.