

Economic Pressure on Media in BiH

ECONOMIC PRESSURE – A TOOL FOR ACHIEVING POLITICAL AIMS

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Post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina is a country full of paradoxes. Many experts, international and domestic, agree that BiH is a unique country in the world by its complexity and complicated structure, non-functionality, irrationality and inefficiency. The crowning feature of all these extremes, in a negative context, is the ethnic concept of governance, which by all relevant parameters is a failed concept, but is persistently persevered in. Another question is – whether it is a spent political concept? Verbally and almost in unison, the ethnic concept of governance is denounced, but it still perseveres in this region.

The wide-spread and generally accepted thesis that the media are a mirror of society is confirmed most clearly on the example of post-Dayton BiH. The local media share in all regards the fate of the entirely broken up country. With rare exceptions, the local media are a reliable barometer and a clear reflex of the deeply divided country – geo-politically, strategically, economically, socially, culturally, religiously, tribally and in every other way. An identity crisis in particular is pronounced because there is no consent on the fundamental values of this country and this society. What is BiH today? A state union, a loose federation, a confederation, or something else? There is no consent on certain starting social and historic premises. There is no consent on the character of the war, above all. For some, it was an aggression, for others, a homeland war. As for the outside world, the term “civil war” is used most often, with elements of religious war and war for territory, which, objectively speaking, is the closest to the truth.

Indicative in this regard is an attempt to set up a Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, initiated exactly five years ago, but it went no further than just the attempt, as a result of strong resistance, primarily coming from the Bosniak people, i.e. Bosniak representatives. The resistance was chiefly motivated by fear that the results of the Commission's work would be an attempt to share out equally the blame for the crimes committed in the recent

war, or to establish some kind of historic *uravnilovka*. On the other hand, persistent speculation on the number of victims just illustrates the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the suddenly declared faithful, who ignore messages from the holy books which say that the numbers of victims are absolutely irrelevant; what is important is the intent to save, or destroy, a life or lives.

Another specificity of post-Dayton BiH is the fact that developments in its neighborhood flow over here in line with the principle of communicating vessels. Nothing in this region is an isolated case, and this overflowing is manifested negatively in BiH due to its historic position. BiH, namely, in its recent history has been in a rift between two paternalisms and hegemonisms – Serbian and Croatian. These negative reflections are particularly evident in the area of economy, business, trade, including the media sector. It is by no means an exaggeration to say that today's BiH is in a colonial position in relation to its neighbors. Of course, no one in their right mind would advocate for enclosing oneself within one's own borders and being isolated, especially at a time of growing inter-dependence of the world and its close interweavement in all walks of life. However, these living ties and this interfusion should take place on an equal level as much as possible, which evidently is not the case here.

The paradox in defining political and economic interest

Even Clausewitz's famous saying that war is the continuation of politics by other means is not applicable in BiH. If war is at the level of politics, actually an instrument of politics, it means that politics, generally speaking, is an instrument for achieving certain interests – territorial, strategic, geopolitical, but basically – economic interests. This means that economic interests are the driving force.

When we talk about pressure on the media in BiH, there is another paradox at work. Even superficial research confirms that economic pressure on the media in BiH is politically motivated. Hence the paradox of the attempt to define political and economic interest in BiH. Namely, economic pressure on the media in BiH is essentially an instrument for achieving certain political aims. In the West, it is the other way around. There, political pressure is an instrument of economic overpowering and subjugation, i.e. making profit and wealth. True, recent developments in America's media arena seem to question this thesis. Once

considered a citadel of free press in the world, after September 11, 2001 America is seriously spoiling this image, through increasing examples of interference of politics in the editorial and programming orientation of media outlets.

Of course, the phenomenon of economic and related pressure on media should not be reduced, or vulgarized, but rather viewed in the broader context of the complex sphere of interpretational categories of politics. This entails a definition of interest, as a dominant category that must be taken note of and researched.

The main lever for achieving certain political, economic and other interests is manipulation of public opinion and its use as a tool, with the aim of obtaining legitimacy and legality for specific political programs. Of course, this is articulated most efficiently via the media, but the problem is always lack of political correctness in articulating such interests.

In order for a certain interest group to take control of the media, or at least to have influence on the media, it must have political, economic and other power. Modern history confirms that economic and financial power is much more efficient than pure physical power and force. Hence, economic and financial pressure is a tested tool of political and every other disciplining. Functionally looking, political power is actually transformed economic and financial power.

Tabloidism of media

Naturally, societies with developed democratic tradition, with strongly profiled and articulated public opinion, do not appreciate media patronized by political and economic power centers. The global trend of media tabloidism should be viewed in this context.

By its original definition, a tabloid is a newspaper with a small format, with brief news, light reading, an abundance of photographs, illustrations, etc. The purpose of the appearance of tabloids is – to entertain and to inform readers at the same time. The formula proved successful and the recipe was adopted by radio and TV. Thus, the term *media tabloidism* regards all media – print and electronic. It sounds paradoxical, but it seems that only online journalism has remained beyond tabloidism and today serious articles, commentaries, essays and similar journalistic and literary forms can be found only on the internet. The

explanation is that the internet is not yet a business in the real meaning of the word; it is in a certain pre-business state, until conditions are created for its stronger expansion towards making profit.

It is essential to emphasize the difference between European and American tabloids. The former combine news and sensations, while the latter absolutely ignore political, economic, financial and other issues from so-called high politics. They focus solely on entertaining reading, sensations and scandals.

In short, the term *tabloid* has experienced a significant semantic shift and from its original important characteristic related to newspaper format, emphasis has moved to the very dissemination of information, i.e. type and manner of content presentation, not only in the press, but also on radio and television.

The tabloidism process has not bypassed countries in transition, including the countries that appeared in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, thus also Bosnia-Herzegovina, the subject of this article.

It is noticeable that almost all tabloidized media have placed content quality second to sensationalism because that is what the market wants. When political issues are presented, advantage is given to politicians' empty rhetoric, or to details from their private lives, developed and presented in a sensationalist manner. There is no doubt that this approach and editorial policy does not require particular professionalism, fitting perfectly into the bleak situation of the media and their protagonists.

Tabloid journalism, therefore, by character and by definition, is more susceptible to manipulation and to being used as a political tool than the traditional media, essentially resulting in loss of credibility. However, no one is worried too much that sensationalist and tendentious journalism is expanding, at the expense of critical journalism, which is pulling back inescapably. It is obvious that media mega groups are trampling upon the principles of free press, i.e. professionalism, because they are not very concerned, actually not concerned at all, with accurate, verified, impartial and timely reporting.

Types of pressure

The types of pressure on the media in Bosnia-Herzegovina are diverse:

- unannounced arrival of financial police;
- refusal of firms and companies to advertise in certain media;
- asking the public to refuse to pay broadcasting subscription fee (tax), a legal obligation;
- lawsuits and high fines, aimed at financially destroying a particular outlet;
- bribing journalists.

Of course, the types of economic and other pressure on the media are not exhausted by this, nor are their conditions and modalities.

In addition to open and sometimes violent pressure, we also witness concealed and subtle pressure, all with the aim of politically disciplining the media. A special place belongs to political manipulation and using the media as a political tool. The purpose is open interference in the editorial and programming policy and orientation of media.

The environment is extremely favorable for manipulating the public and media, primarily as a consequence of the overall low level of culture of the population in the region, which means lack of political culture and underdeveloped and unarticulated public opinion. Journalists, even editors, are insufficiently educated and professionally trained, and as such susceptible to manipulation and being used as tools. If they are insufficiently paid, they are inclined to bribery and corruption.

The overall poor situation in the country, economic devastation, lack of perspective, lack of rule of law, corrupt and incompetent politicians, is favorable to the general unflattering environment for the media.

A particular problem is the so-called international community in BiH, whatever this fluid and vague term may mean. Most of the crucial laws and decisions have been imposed by the High Representative (OHR), but when their implementation starts, the international community backs away, under the pretext: "This is your country," "These are your

decisions,” etc. All this additionally burdens the overall unfavorable situation and relations in the country, including the media sector, in the area of doing business. Namely, intervention of the international community in media reconstruction and introduction of western European media standards is a positive example of the international community’s engagement in BiH, especially in the context of the shameful role of the media in inciting ethnic, national, religious and other intolerance and hate, which had led to the tragic conflict.

The already mentioned low culture of the population, coupled with dramatic demographic changes, has led to ruralization of urban communities, with a particularly harsh effect on the print media. The size of the illiterate and functionally illiterate population in cities, the largest potential press consumers, has resulted in a devastating fact – less than five percent of the country’s total population buys newspapers. Of course, the economic power of the population, or lack thereof, strongly assists this unfavorable trend.

The Law on Value Added Tax (VAT), which was recently passed and is planned to take effect on September 1 this year, will additionally deteriorate the already poor situation of the print media. Namely, VAT means an extra tax (for now 17 percent) on press and books, including even school textbooks.

Normative projection and the actual situation

Compared to its neighbors, Bosnia-Herzegovina has a solid legislative framework within which the media operate. The Communications Regulatory Agency (RAK/CRA) is responsible for radio and TV stations and the sector of communications at state level. CRA issues licenses to broadcasters and monitors abidance by the Broadcast Code of Practice. It focuses on the aspect of programming contents and applies more complex criteria to public broadcasters, in light of their position and funding.

Another law at state level is the Law on the Public Broadcasting System/Service, also designed in line with western European media standards. As some of the areas in the law were unclear and undefined, amendments were drafted. After several months of discussion, the Council of Ministers gave an official recommendation for the harmonized amendments to be entered into parliamentary procedure for adoption.

Under the present legislative solution, there are three public broadcasters: Public Broadcasting Service, better known as BHT1, and two entity public broadcasters: Federal Television BiH (FTV) and Radio Television Republika Srpska (RT RS). There is also a fourth legal subject, better known as corporation, which completes the system.

According to latest CRA data, a total of 189 broadcasters operate in BiH: 147 radio stations and 42 TV stations. Although this figure is much lower than it used to be, i.e. before the creation of the Independent Media Commission (IMC) in the summer of 1998 as the predecessor of today's CRA, there is still a big disproportion in BiH between the total number of media outlets and the size of the population (3.8 million).

In its practice so far, the Agency's fines have been relatively moderate: from 3,000 to 5,000 KM (1,500 to 2,500 euros), but it recently made a precedent, penalizing the local TV Alfa from Sarajevo to pay 50,000 KM because its programming contained insulting content on racial and religious ground. More precisely, in a pre-Bairam *hutba* (Ramadan Bairam, November 2004), a guest in the program, a religious official, carried anti-Semitic messages and openly called for lynching infidels.

The rationale for the fine says that TV Alfa had earlier frequently violated the Code and that the fine will probably be followed by suspension. This did not happen, however, because in the meantime the TV station went off the air, selling its license/frequency to the NIP Avaz company, which owns *Dnevni Avaz*, the highest circulation paper in BiH.

The phenomenon of the Avaz company will be analyzed separately in another section of this article; according to numerous indicators, it is a paradigmatic case which clearly reflects the media landscape of BiH, precisely in the context of researching the phenomenology and typology of economic and other pressure on media in this country.

The print media in BiH are left to the concept of self-regulation. It had originally been planned that the then Independent Media Commission (IMC) would also be responsible for the press, but what prevailed was the stand of international representatives (dominant British standpoint) that the press in BiH should be left to self-regulation. In this regard, BiH is the first country in the region to establish a self-regulatory body called Press Council, composed of representatives of the profession and non-governmental sector, civil society

and citizens. In this transitional period, the Council is headed by a foreigner (from Great Britain), which is already an anachronism in itself and to a certain extent burdens the complex and subtle process of self-regulation. As the Communications Regulatory Agency has been composed of local people for the third year now, the Press Council should also thank Robert Pinker and name a local man as its head. A Press Code has been drafted and it is mostly a compilation of existing codes of ethics, with certain paragraphs built in that suit the specific organization of post-Dayton BiH.

The Press Council became operational two years ago, but its effects and range have been modest. To recall, the term *media self-regulation* suggests lack of all legislation and force. However, in the environment of a country which is like a castle in the air, with acultural traditions, disturbed values, split consciousness and identity, strong animosity, buried in ethno-nationalism and the past, overnight and showy religiousness, and regular irresponsibility and sloppiness of people in this region, the concept of self-regulation simply cannot work.

A recent case of kidnapping of the son of an athlete from Sarajevo is indicative of this. The parents and police asked the media not to report on what happened, in order not to jeopardize the boy's life, for whose release the kidnappers were asking one million euros! *Dnevni Avaz* turned a deaf ear to these appeals and even carried a photograph of the boy on the front page, which is in opposition to the Press Code.

Avaz refused to admit its lack of professionalism and even denied the legitimacy of the Press Council and code for journalists, although its own representatives had taken part in creating the Press Code. Expressing its traditional arrogance, *Avaz* announced creating a parallel Press Council.

This example, like the example of recapitalization of the Sarajevo *Oslobodjenje*, the oldest daily newspaper in BiH, which will be discussed a little later, enriches the spectrum of pressure on the media, but also underlines all the specificities of the BiH media environment. Namely, exponents of pressure are also the media themselves, in a ruthless media war.

BiH is the first in the region to decriminalize defamation and libel. Journalists can no longer be imprisoned for defamation and libel, but in civil suits they are threatened with high fines and this has a negative reflection in the form of self-censorship of journalists and media. The paradox is that it is mostly journalists who are suing each other, followed by politicians and journalists. Hundreds of court cases are ongoing.

BiH is also the first in the region to legally regulate the matter of freedom of access to information. However, the effects and range of this legislation are feeble. Blame for this lies dominantly with the profession. Journalists have not realized yet the advantages and benefits of this law, especially in the context of investigative journalism.

In last year's Reporters without Borders (RSF) survey on media freedom, or lack thereof, in the world, BiH is relatively highly ranked, in 21st place (even above the United States), and far above all its immediate neighbors – Croatia and Serbia & Montenegro. BiH's high placement is primarily a result of legislation that is harmonized with western European media standards. Merit for this belongs primarily to the international community in BiH, which initiated and sponsored numerous media projects, including media legislation, which was usually imposed. Of course, there is an evident gap between the normative projection and the actual situation, not just in the media sector, but broader as well, particularly in the field of protection of fundamental human rights and liberties, which also affect journalists as an integral part of the social and political community.

The relationship between media ownership and their independent position is a closely tied one. In highly developed countries and regulated states, where the rules of market are in effect, media owners generally do not interfere with their editorial and programming policy and orientation. However, in poor countries with feeble democratic tradition, such as BiH, media control and manipulation is used more pronouncedly and openly.

A more subtle, but more dangerous form of assault on the independent position of the media is media concentration, of the Berlusconi kind in Italy. In BiH, for now, there are no examples of media concentration. Hence, *Rule 21/2003 on Media Concentration and Media Ownership*, which constitutes an integral part of the *Law on Communications of BiH* (in effect as of April 1, 2004), is an act of thwarting potential abuse in this area. The law prohibits multiple ownership of local broadcasters, particularly when they cover the same

population. The key provision states that no physical or legal person may be the owner of two or more broadcasters. Joint or cross ownership of broadcasters and print media is also restricted. It is stipulated that a physical or legal person, who owns one radio or TV station, may at the same time be the owner of one print media outlet. The law, i.e. a Communications Regulatory Agency *rule*, allows transfer of broadcasting licenses.

It is important that the Communications Regulatory Agency strictly oversees the implementation of this law because getting around the law would constitute potentially the greatest danger for the independent and plural media landscape in BiH.

Advertising

Advertising is the most efficient tool of economic pressure on the media in BiH. Journalists of the Sarajevo weekly *Dani* were the first to learn this the hard way. Due to their pro-Bosnian-Herzegovinian orientation and editorial policy conducted in this spirit, they were threatened with denial of advertising by certain companies influenced by the forces that advocate hardline Bosniak national interests. It is superfluous to point out that print media cannot survive from sale of circulation and that they depend decisively on advertising. For a newspaper to survive, especially a periodical magazine, a minimum of 30 percent of its space must be taken up by advertisements. Advertisers, as a rule, are large and profitable state-owned companies (Elektroprivreda BiH – the electricity company, Telecom BiH, Poste BiH – the postal service, etc.), which are under the influence of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the leading Bosniak political party. The situation in Serb and Croat majority populated areas is similar.

Religious communities also resort to pressure. Last summer *Dani* was again fiercely attacked over a graphically and artistically distasteful front page showing Reis Ceric, head of the Islamic Community of BiH, indecently dressed and using a hot sex-line. A letter was in circulation, signed by Reis Ceric, which by its content and tone was actually a *fatwa* prohibiting advertising in *Dani* and in other media with similar editorial concepts.

This case at the same time illustrates and confirms the strong and dangerous collusion of the state, the political structures and the clergy. It is unnecessary to point out the fatalness of such practice for the independent position of media.

The problem of advertising is also pronounced in the electronic media, especially public broadcasters. An audit report provided by the specialized foreign company Ernst&Young indicates lack of logic in reduction of advertising time of large state-owned companies and systems which have monopoly, suggesting that management structures are under the direct and open influence of incumbent policies. This should not be surprising if one knows that management structures are part of the current political establishment, or part of formal, or informal, centers of political power. The law on conflict of interest is simply no good here.

At a time of a real campaign against FTV, whose program has been qualified as anti-Bosniak and anti-Islamic (the political magazine "60 Minutes" is particularly targeted), an open call for refusal to pay the legally prescribed broadcast tax was sent out from the federal parliament speaker's platform. That is also Bosnia. Legally elected parliamentarians are calling to the public for civil disobedience, this time in the form of refusing to pay broadcast tax. Right-wing Bosniak media undividedly joined the boycott: *Dnevni Avaz*, *Ljiljan* and *Valter*. The calls did have effect and the normally low percentage of collection of broadcast tax, which was around 50 percent in the BiH Federation (in the Republika Srpska some 60 percent), in November last year fell under 45 percent.

The negative perception of FTV in part of the manipulated Bosniak public was completed as a result of a disagreement regarding the Ramadan *vaktija* program (end of the day's fasting). The disagreement emerged between BHT1 and FTV regarding which one of the two broadcasters would air the Ramadan *vaktija* program and in the first several days there was no program at all, either on BHT1 or on FTV. It is interesting that RTRS aired the Ramadan *vaktija* schedule every morning. The reaction to this major omission on the part of the public broadcasters was a hasty decision of the Islamic Community of BiH *Rijaset* (head office of the largest religious community in BiH) to ban direct broadcast of the Ramadan Bairam on FTV and BHT1, not just from Bey's Mosque in Sarajevo, but from all mosques in BiH. The local TV Hayat from Sarajevo was allowed to broadcast directly.

This case can be viewed in the context of the Law on Freedom of Access to Information and particularly in the context of *Rule 01/1999, Definitions and obligations of public broadcasters, Amended text, RAK/CRA* of September 22, 2003, which clearly defines and regulates the obligations of the public broadcasters, which must articulate public interest.

This time the interest was to directly broadcast the Ramadan Bairam, the greatest Islamic holiday. The *Rijaset* behaved here as a para-state institution, turning a deaf ear to authentic public interest. The state, on the other hand, like the international community embodied in the High Representative (OHR), remained completely aside. It is becoming indicative how much the international community is shutting its eyes before striking examples of anti-Dayton conduct on the part of the local clergy.

The sickening impression was not mended by a later decision to allow the public broadcasters to directly broadcast the Kurban Bairam.

This unfortunate event would almost have jeopardized the survival of FTV if a large advertiser had not appeared from neighboring Serbia: Grandcaffe company, which suddenly walked in with a financial shot of 2 million KM. Obviously, large systems outside BiH are beyond the reach of domestic politics.

Right before wrapping up this article, we received a copy of a memo from the commercial Mreza Plus network (made up of TV Hayat, Radio Television Mostar (east), Croat Television Oscar-C Mostar (west), Tuzla Television and Alternative Television Banja Luka), sent to the Communications Regulatory Agency, Association of Electronic Media of BiH, International Advertising Association (IAA), USAID/Chemonics International, and Ministry of Transport and Communications of BiH. The order of the addressees is indicative. The responsible state ministry is last?!

The memo emphasizes the problem of signal spillover from neighboring countries, unregulated status of cable operators, who keep airing programs in BiH territory for which they have not regulated copyrights, and alleged grave violation of CRA rules with regard to issuance of long-term licenses. This is a clear allusion to FTV, which has considerably reduced its news, political, documentary and cultural programming in favor of entertaining, sub-cultural contents, such as karaoke and reality shows, although as a public broadcaster it has a national frequency and is able to broadcast in the entire territory of BiH.

FTV's position is partly a result of the undefined status and position of the three public broadcasters in BiH. BHT1 aspires for the role of the leading channel, which the entity broadcasters are denying.

The International Advertising Association branch in BiH recently met to resolve what they called burning problems on the BiH media market.

An illustrative example is OBN television (partly owned by Nova TV from Zagreb), which also has a license for national coverage. Although it has modest ratings (five percent at BiH level in January this year) and an equal market share, OBN has no legislative restrictions in terms of use of commercial time, which is not the case in any of the neighboring countries, and thus offers the market the most favorable, i.e. lowest price lists for advertisements, which jeopardizes the entire BiH advertising industry. On top of this, by doing business through advertising agencies from Croatia, a client who advertises on OBN is exempted from service tax, depriving the BiH state of revenue.

The Communications Regulatory Agency has the next move and it should take a clear stand on all of the above and other problems. CRA should first re-examine the licensing requirements of media which have significantly changed their scope of production and programming format.

It is essential to start implementing the Law on Competition (passed in 2001), which clearly defines and prohibits monopolistic operation and concentration on the market. Any concentration that may jeopardize competition in the territory of BiH is prohibited.

An initiative has been made to draft an IAA code, as some kind of self-regulation in this area aimed at establishing fair business customs and conduct among media, agencies and clients. Following a formula similar to that of the Press Council, a Council of Honor will be created to monitor what is happening on the BiH media market and react to violation of good business customs. In case an advertising agency or media outlet (regardless of whether they are IAA members) violates the IAA Code, the public will be warned via the media of their unfair conduct.

A self-regulatory model in the advertising industry may considerably alleviate and even reduce economic and other pressure on the media in BiH.

Dnevni Avaz vs. Oslobodjenje

The case of an attack by the Avaz company on *Oslobodjenje* is paradigmatic in the context of analyzing the issue of economic and other pressure on the media in BiH.

When so-called recapitalization of *Oslobodjenje* was announced in early December last year, the Avaz company raised the alarm. Sarajevo Brewery and Tobacco Factory Sarajevo were mentioned among the companies that were to participate in the paper's recapitalization. The weekly *Ljiljan* and the fortnightly *Valter* joined an orchestrated attack on *Oslobodjenje* because the recapitalization was seen as an attempt to save the economically fallen paper.

No one is denying that *Oslobodjenje*, in addition to material and financial difficulty, is also in a deep professional and creative crisis. A sentence is remembered which was uttered by Kemal Kurspahic, former editor-in-chief of the paper, in his book "The Crime at 19.30" – the paper may lose in peace the battles it won in war.

Towards the end of September last year, the newsroom announced a discrete graphic redesign of the paper, but the editorial concept and orientation remained practically unchanged. Certain artistic, graphic and content interventions suggest more energetic turning to a tabloid concept. To illustrate, there has been sports news featured on the front page, which is typical of a tabloid. However, a manner of sloppiness and carelessness keeps pervading the paper. The same news item often appears in two different places, differently presented by the editors. There are too many question marks behind bombastically worded headlines, questioning the reliability of sources of information.

The circulation is certainly modest: around 12,000 copies, with a high number of unsold copies. Since newspaper circulations are the best guarded secret on the local media market, it is assessed that only some 8,000 copies of the paper are sold.

Nevertheless, *Dnevni Avaz* swooped down on the staggering *Oslobodjenje*. Evidently, with a fervent wish to finally finish it off.

In Avaz's mongering and persecutory rhetoric, *Oslobodjenje* is called "communist" and it goes on to say: "After all, who killed, the media way, the Pozderac brothers, who arrested Muslims in '83," and who helped bring Milosevic to power back in his time as a regional savior..." (*Dnevni Avaz*, December 6, 2004).

For readers outside BiH, the Pozderac brothers were highly ranked in the former Yugoslavia, while the court case from '83 regarded members of Mladi Muslimani (Young Muslims), who were denounced in the former regime, together with other national retrograde ideologies and movements. When the issue of lustration was raised in BiH a while ago, then BiH President Alija Izetbegovic, who was the primary accused person in the '83 case, said clearly and decisively that there will be no revanchism, alluding to the prosecutors and judges from that time, because the crimes we had committed and were tried for were illegal in that state.

On the occasion of the recent opening of the Avaz business building on the ground-plan of the destroyed *Oslobodjenje* high-rise buildings in Sarajevo's Nedzarici settlement, Mirko Sagolj, columnist and former editor-in-chief of the paper, wrote an inspired commentary, entitled "Shame and 'pride'" (*Oslobodjenje*, February 12, 2005). The editors extracted a striking sub-headline: "The high-rise that was a symbol of the honorable BiH was replaced by high-rises that symbolize the disgraceful, plundering BiH." In the commentary, the author recalls that the state of BiH (before Dayton) owed the paper some 1.5 million marks, and that the same state, through the SDA, sponsored the new daily project with 10 million marks!

A high-ranked SDA official, Timur Numic, once a zealous member of the Communist League of Yugoslavia (SKJ), literally said in a political meeting: "We have created a bug that will eat up *Oslobodjenje*."

Unfortunately, everything indicates that the threat will ultimately come true.

This case is a specific, but flagrant and brutal example of economic crushing of a newspaper, by way of another newspaper which, however, is just the executor of an earlier passed political decision to eliminate a paper with democratic tradition and civilization values.

Poor material status of journalists is a pre-condition of manipulation

As routine and stereotype as it may sound, the media really do inevitably share the fate of the country and society, as presented and described above.

Finally, it is essential to emphasize once more the inferior, almost colonial position and status of BiH in relation to its neighbors. This economic dependence has a negative reflection on the media market in BiH. In addition to the already mentioned spillover of signal, i.e. TV programming, daily and weekly newspapers from the neighboring countries have considerable popularity in BiH, especially the Belgrade *Vecernje Novosti* and the Zagreb *Vecernji List*. There is no reliable data, but it is estimated that the sold circulations of these two papers in BiH are higher than the circulation of *Oslobodjenje*, with sale of the Banja Luka *Nezavisne Novine* also being threatened in the Republika Srpska by *Vecernje Novosti*. True, sale of *Nezavisne Novine* is threatened due to its overall pro-Bosnian orientation and editorial policy, which unfortunately, is still being rejected in most of the Republika Srpska.

The credo of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) says there is no free press if journalists work in conditions of fear, pressure and material insecurity, which is actually a common element in the cheerless media landscape in BiH.

A case that can serve as an illustration is an action taken by Zeljko Mitrovic, owner of TV Pink BiH, who recently, commenting on the dismissal of 18 of his employees, said he will not tolerate any kind of syndicate organization, because “this is not socialism, or self-rule”!?

The statement is certainly striking in that it demonstrates the unenviable status of numerous journalists and technical staff in media outlets.

In an open letter written by the association “BH Journalists,” the owner of TV Pink BiH is reminded that labor legislation in BiH allows for syndicate organization and activity of employees, with the aim of protecting their labor rights, and that this is “neither a socialist, nor Tito’s legacy, but a human right of workers in the whole world...”

The “BH Journalists” letter will not help much if proclamations are the end of it, and if journalists and other media staff do not finally start putting more energy into improving their unenviable position.

A journalist who is financially provided for is harder to manipulate, and this is a reliable way towards, if not eliminating, at least narrowing the maneuvering space for political, economic and other manipulation and pressure on the media.

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