

## **The Media Landscape of Montenegro**

### **AWAKENING OF THE PUBLIC AND MEDIA**

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What proves that constitution of civil, critical public is a long-term and arduous, but attainable task in an extremely politicized society, is a decision made by the Montenegrin public, which chose as the most positive event in the country (according to research carried out by the agency "Martin Board International" for 2004) the protection of the Tara river and canyon. To recall, the Montenegrin Assembly passed the Declaration on the Protection of the Tara after a long battle against the extremely strong international energy lobbies supported by certain circles in local authorities, which was started by the media and non-governmental organizations, and in the end supported not only by opposition political parties, but also by one of the parties in power. This has prevented for the time being the building of the hydro-electric power plant "Buk Bijela" between Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and with it destruction of the deepest and most beautiful European canyon (after Colorado, the second in the world) and flooding of the "last European tear," as this ecological pearl is called in UNESCO catalogs. In light of negative events in Montenegro, in the same survey, respondents emphasized as the worst thing that happened in 2004 the murder of former "Dan" Editor-in-Chief Dusko Jovanovic. Therefore, the media and journalists are again inevitable actors not only in political public opinion, but also in the constitution of an autonomous civil public and consensus on issues of importance to life. Of course, all in the interest of democratization of the pronouncedly politicized and divided Montenegrin society and the two opposing political options.

In order to understand public opinion and the media situation in Montenegro, in particular the political public, whose actors are authorities (politicians), media and citizens, one must bear in mind that two antagonistic political options have crystallized on the Montenegrin political stage (according to a number of public opinion researches). One, personified in incumbent authorities who strive for full Montenegrin independence, and the other political option, represented by opposition parties and focused on strong integration of Serbia and Montenegro. In this context, according to research into the views and habits of readers, listeners and viewers, the citizens' division between the political options is reflected in the media mirror (it is reflected through the media). In the past three years, when there were as many as six domicile daily papers for a population of 620,000 (a real phenomenon, not just in media terms, but in economic terms as well), the prevalent opinion was that the local media was not independent, and that it was known in the press "who is with whom" politically, as well as economically. In the meantime, with the shutting down of the Montenegrin editions of "Montenegro-blic" and "Glas Crnogoraca," practically the entire bloc of pro-Serbian press or press that cherished and propagated a unitary policy disappeared. True, even today there is a similar tendency at "Dan," whose once high circulation by Montenegrin standards has fallen compared to the now leading "Vijesti," which, as part of the powerful WAZ, was the first in the region to launch sale of books together with newspapers. On the other hand, without assistance from the formerly joint budget of FRY (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) and financial support from those who share the unitary option in Montenegro, "Dan" compensated by launching "Revija D," which in a short time became the highest circulation weekly in the Republic. This allowed the paper to remain in the battle for influence. The tabloid "Revija D" greatly reminds of "Dan," which continues to cherish sensationalism, scandalous information, as well as exclusive articles, which practically do not exist in other Montenegrin daily papers that are part of the pro-sovereignty press. The review "Istok," which comes out occasionally, can also be included among the pro-Serbian press by its content, but it has insignificant circulation and influence.

Also part of the latter bloc is the once solitary Montenegrin daily "Pobjeda," which in the past six decades passed the road from glorifying Yugoslav ideas to Montenegrin statehood ideas. In "Pobjeda," which is on a path of privatization, for a long time there have been no commentaries that would make it recognizable, but there have been no

surprises either, because, as long-time readers assess, it has always been considered a pro-regime mouthpiece and a newspaper that is traditionally read over the first morning coffee. In September this year, the low-circulation “Republika” was founded, differing from what used to be “Publika,” also pro-sovereignty (which stopped coming out last summer), according to readers’ and analysts’ assessments, basically only by the paper’s name. “Vijesti,” once spearheading pro-independence ideas, is today turned more towards citizens’ everyday problems, probably as a result of a change in its ownership structure (it belongs to the publishing corporation chain Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung). In any case, “Vijesti” has excellent ratings and is often carried and quoted even by the electronic media in their news programs. In any case, along with the low-circulation weekly “Monitor,” which has always been in favor of an independent Montenegro without any calculations, only “Vijesti” has been carrying in continuity commentaries, noticed columns and a trend of investigative journalism. The total circulation of the 45 print media registered in Montenegro is not known (four dailies, three weeklies, eight bi-monthlies, 13 monthlies, quarterlies, semi-annuals, annual papers, and others...). However, according to latest Media Institute of Montenegro data, the average circulation of daily newspapers in the republic is some 60,000 copies, which is an imposing figure for its population, if one bears in mind that the average number of pages for this type of medium is 38 and that one copy costs half a euro. In a Media Institute survey, out of 1,382 citizens, as many as 40 percent of the respondents maintain that newspapers do not fulfill the social role of control over holders of political and economic power and 33 percent chose the answer “only partly.” According to the vast majority of respondents, the strongest guarantee that newspapers will write truthfully, comprehensively and without political bias is their independence of political parties (32%), followed by moral and professional credibility of the editor-in-chief and journalists (28%), while financial independence as a guarantee of objectivity (17%) only took third place by importance. It is interesting that in a New Year’s Eve survey (whose results will soon be made public) there were changes in answers to the question of guarantee of independence – the economic factor, i.e. financial independence, came before moral and professional credibility of the editor-in-chief and journalists.

How much Montenegrin society is political par excellence is unambiguously shown by a CEDEM public opinion research (on a respectable sample of 1,030 respondents) of political public opinion, where only 17 percent of the respondents claim they are not

sufficiently informed about political developments, while the rest are sufficiently informed, partly informed or fully informed. One-fifth of the respondents, or more precisely 21 percent, do not trust television as a medium, while as many as 45 percent do not trust radio or do not listen to it. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents said they do not read newspapers or do not trust the print media. Of all electronic media, they have most trust in the public broadcasting services Television Montenegro and Radio Montenegro, and of all dailies in "Vijesti." In contrast to the results of this April research, in a June research there was a seven percent decrease in the number of respondents who do not trust any newspaper. The key difference, however, between the two researches regards trust in daily newspapers because in the meantime the murder of the "Dan" Editor-in-Chief resulted in that trust in "Dan" rose by a whole eight percent and moved on the scale of trust closer to the untouchable "Vijesti," competing with "Pobjeda," the oldest Montenegrin daily, "Publika" (shut down in the meantime), and several Belgrade dailies traditionally present on the Montenegrin print media market. This information confirms that the present social developments strongly influence fluctuations in public opinion.

After all, even the Frankfurt circle theoreticians, in the 60's, assess through a critical prism Walter Lipmann's theory from the 20's of the last century on equality of press, public opinion and reality. Along with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's theory of cultural industry, what is also current in the context of Montenegrin political and media reality is Herbert Marcuse's opinion that press and television create a single-dimensional picture of reality, with the purpose of social integration and preventing social conflict. Is not what you hear and see in the evening in newscasts in primetime news programs in the electronic media already tomorrow on the front pages of daily newspapers? And so, while media content depends on politicians' activities, who control the public like in Orwell's and Huxley's novels, shaping the single-dimensional citizen in transition, which is the essence – no one can deny media pluralism in form. This is supported by the increasing number of media outlets, ownership diversity (from commercial ownership to the public service), solid institutional and legislative media infrastructure in line with European models... Despite this, economic independence does not exist even for the only public broadcasting republic service, Radio Television Montenegro, but it also does not exist for the almost 2,000 media professionals who were working in 2004 for 75 media outlets.

According to Media Institute data, 108 media outlets and seven bureaus operate in Montenegro, of which 42 are radio stations, 15 television stations, four online (the most frequently visited are **cafemontenegro.cg.yu** and **pcnen.cg.yu**), and one news agency, which is 32 outlets less than in 2002. As for the media ownership structure, the most common media owners are enterprises – 32 (31.4%), followed by public services – 22 (21.6%), and non-governmental organizations – 16 (15.7%). Enterprises generally own radio stations (17), while non-governmental agencies usually possess print media outlets. It remains to be seen how many outlets will survive after the Broadcasting Agency of Montenegro allocates frequencies in early 2005 because a tender announced on December 24, 2004 will bring a number of novelties in radio and television broadcasting as a result of new and strict rules coming into effect. This means that in the future there will be no more compensation or pardoning of broadcasters' dues and debts because everyone will have the same starting position. Since there is a complete media legislative framework, all broadcasters who receive a frequency will have to obey rules and regulations and forget about piracy and "carrying" satellite programming. For instance, according to draft guidelines on the amount, duration and distribution of advertising, it is envisioned that the total duration of advertising on any particular day in the public service RTCG (Radio Television Montenegro) shall not exceed seven minutes per programming hour. Private broadcasters shall not have more than 12 minutes of advertising and teleshopping contents. Finally, the question that comes up is: can the media fill even the mentioned quotas of advertising duration from advertisers in the impoverished economy and increasingly poor citizens and launch their own radio and television production.

And thus, media transition will soon be completed in Montenegro. In line with the popular saying "those who survive will talk about it." That is the whole point, because if the media does not succeed in recording and explaining to citizens that transition as a process is not just something that is imposed by those who conduct reform; that it is also the story of everyday life and adjustment to reform on the part of each and every citizen in a democratic system, there will be no citizens who are well informed, nor will there be any democracy. Let us go back to the beginning of this analysis, i.e. protection of the Tara as the event of the year in Montenegro and the awakening of the Montenegrin media and public at last. Or, as John Keane alleges in the book "The Media and Democracy" (1991)

on new ecological risks: “Democracy and media in the service of the public are a reflexive means of controlling the exercise of authority.”

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