

"KRONEN ZEITUNG", "GRUPPO", "POLITIKA"...

The Austrian daily paper with the biggest circulation – "Kronen Zeitung" – co-owned by the biggest Austrian publisher Hans Dichand and WAZ (each owning an equal stake of 50%) in the middle of September this year found itself in the middle of the big affair. Kronen Zeitung's editor-in-chief, Michael Dichand (Hans' son), gave an interview for „Osterreichisch Journalist" in which he accused WAZ of cooperating with the Balkan mafia!

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In that interview, Dichand also mentioned the biggest Croatian publisher "Europapers holding" (publisher of "Jutarnji list", "Gloбус", "Glorija", "Arena", "Mila", the Croatian editions of "Playboy" and "Cosmopolitan", etc.). Actually its head, Ninoslav Pavic, and his involvement in the "Gruppo" affair.

"Gruppo" is an affair which first appeared in 2000, when its main characters were imprisoned for a short period. It began with the secret purchasing of 51% of the shares of "Europapers holding" in 1995 by Miroslav Kutle, who was at the time a powerful businessman in the HDZ's ranks. The story goes on with the signing of a secret contract between Kutle, Pavic, Vinko Grubisic (at the time owner of "Omladinska TV" from Zagreb) and the secret fourth co-owner, whose identity was speculated to be Ivic Pasalic, the person who practically controlled Franjo Tudjman in the last years of his life. According to the accusations, the idea was to buy and control the media with dirty money, for the benefit of the HDZ. However, the court investigation in this case was aborted soon after the release from custody of the main characters, who were detained for a couple of hours. Recently, the investigative bodies in Croatia, investigating the "Rotond Center" case where Kutle and Pavic are involved, have made the 'Gruppo' affair popular once again.

Michael Dichand's interview can also be seen as the final episode of the "family feud" between the owners of "Kronen Zeitung". The publishers of "Kronen Zeitung", Hans Dichand (82) and WAZ, strained their relations when Dichand decided to retire and to appoint his son Michael to take his place as editor-in-chief of the newspaper. This decision by Dichand senior is related with his objection to selling big Austrian companies to multinational companies where Germans have the dominant role. In Austria, Hans Dichand has an indisputable reputation and influence- it is claimed that any decision or project on a national level cannot be made without Dichand's consent; some even go as far as to suggest that one can win Austria's election only if one has Dichand's support. Of course, Dichand's power derives from the fact that "Kronen Zeitung" sells millions of copies each day, which means that it is read by 43.3% of all Austrians!

Of course the feud between the biggest Austrian publisher and WAZ has also to do with money. "Krone", as the Austrians like to call the "Kronen Zeitung", is estimated at 800 million euros. Starting from 2000, the two equal co-owners have been trying to buy each other out. The pressures on Dichand to sell his part of Krone are said to have increased when Bodo Hombach - the former head of the Stability Pact - became the head of WAZ. People claim that he is a close friend of the German chancellor Schroeder. In the interview for „Osterreichische Journalist", the younger Dichand, Michael, accused Bodo Hombach that he was bribed with 1,3 million marks and that along with Ninoslav Pavic he arranged the sale of "Politika" to WAZ with the late Serbian prime minister, Djindjic. A year ago, some German media also discussed these speculations.