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This project is financed by the European Union

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Editorial

How local media in BiH are funded?

The work of *local media* in Bosnia and Herzegovina depends significantly on the public financing allocated from the budgets of municipalities, cities and cantons. Funding of *public* local media outlets is almost entirely influenced by decisions of the legislative and executive institutions of local government, while *private* local media is primarily financed from marketing. However, through advertising private local media often establish financial ties with local community institutions.

Although public budgets are more diverse regarding the possibilities and sources of media funding, which is favourable for strengthening the financial sustainability of local private and public media, the budgets of the government institutions rarely contain the exact amounts allocated to the media, and even rarer media beneficiaries of these funds are named, which has also been shown by the extensive research on media funding from public budgets conducted under the project "*Media and Public Credibility*"¹.

Non-transparent financing of local media from public budgets has a number of negative consequences, among other media freedom space narrows, less critical reporting and more political bias occur. Local government often use its donor position to instrumentalize the media by influencing editorial policy and neglecting the public interest. When publishing the content, media professionals are often forced to promote the work of local officials, while at the same time they are prohibited from accessing critical reporting on the work of local institutions.

Invisible money flows between the government and the media at the local level are especially problematic during the election campaign, when political apathy for media support is multiplied. Citizens bear the severe consequences of non-transparency of local media funding because they are denied the right to receive objective and impartial information about the events and processes that take place in their local community.

49th edition of E-Journalist examines patterns of media financing from the public sector at the local level in BiH; who, and based on which procedures, decides on financing the media; which criteria are used for determination when it comes to allocation of public funds to media outlets; and what are the effects of invisible flows of public money on media reporting on local issues? The authors of the texts are: journalists **Vera Soldo** from Mostar, **Velida Kulenović** from Zenica, **Milan Kovač** from Banja Luka and **Miro Pejić** from Srebrenica; while the interview for this edition of E-Journalist was given by **Sanela Hodžić**, researcher from Media Center Sarajevo.

Arman Fazlić, E-journalist Editor

1 Report "In search for better regulation of transparency of ownership and public financing of media", result of extensive research conducted Consortium consisting of BH Journalists Association, Mediacentar Sarajevo, the Press Council and the Association JaBiHEU; available at: <http://bhnovinari.ba/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/english.pdf>

Events

19-21 Nov 2017

Journalist Academy “Reporting on Gender Issues Based Violence, held in Jahorina

14 Nov 2017

Presentation of report:” Looking for better ownership transparency regulation and media transparency of media ownership and financing of media houses in Bosnia through public budget funds”

10 Nov 2017

EU-Western Balkans Media Days: EU may provide help, but genuine changes must be made by journalists themselves

Media on media

23 Nov 2017

Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia and Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina: Infamous decision by the Prosecutors’ Office on rejecting felony report against assaulters and attackers on journalists

Vacancies

Invitation for video report preparation
Deadline for application: 5 Dec 2017

[Details](#)

Forthcoming events

- Meetings and focus groups in cities and towns throughout BiH; Editors meeting (30 Nov); Journalists’ Awards (12 Dec) as part of “**End Violence against Women and Girls**”

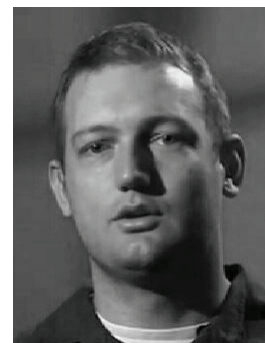
- **Syrian Journalists visit** to BHJA and radio stations editing offices (29 – 30 Nov)

- Meeting in Konjic: **Regional Platform for Advocating Media Freedom and Journalists’ Safety in Western Balkans** (6 – 9 Dec)

Local media financing in Republic of Srpska

By: Milan Kovač

The answer to this question seems rather simple since it contains 64 sub-contracts, which is exactly the number of municipalities and towns in Republic of Srpska. There is no law, at the level of Republic of Srpska, which precisely defines how local media financing should be tailored; instead, financing of media houses is the responsibility of local communities because they are entitled to handle this issue on their own. Additionally, local media houses, (mainly local radio stations) are financed directly from municipal and city / town budgets or they (local radio stations) are simply granted with certain financial means from same budgets.



Local Communities Conveyance

The Law on determining and transferring of property rights to the capital of Republic of Srpska (in local radio and television stations) to local self – governments, passed in 2010 and amended in 2012 (Official Gazette No. 73, published on 30 July 2010. 70/12), defines that the capital of all local radio stations shall be transferred to founders of these media houses and, in most cases, the establishers / founders include municipal or city / town assemblies, said the officials from the Ministry of Traffic and Communications of Republic of Srpska.

Pursuant to this, this legal regulation is transferred to local self – governing levels. Local radio stations submit their reports on work and operations conducted and financial reports to city / town and municipal assemblies for passing. Ministry of Traffic and Communications of Republic of Srpska officials say that labour / work permits and frequency licenses are legally issued by the Communication Regulatory Agency (RAK) which, at the same time, controls the process of requested work requirements that must be met in order to obtain work license and permit.

There are 5 locally – orientated television stations in Republic of Srpska and around 40 radio stations. Local communities issue over 50 printed weekly, monthly and annual reports and there are over hundred local web sites.

Public Local Media

Public local media include radio, TV and online or printed issues established by city / town or municipal authorities. In most cases these are radio stations and this is why the existence and work operations, including the financing, mainly vary from municipality to municipality.

In Gacko municipality (Herzegovina region), radio Gacko operates as public local radio station as part of the local Information and Cultural Centre Public Establishment. This radio station has 8 employees working on full time basis. Gacko Radio station disposes of BAM 183.480.00 on an annual level. Still, due to reducing process of public incomes and very difficult situation for all local communities in Republic of Srpska, it has been noted that decreasing and insufficient amounts of money were planned and dispersed to local media houses. Gacko Municipality is no exception here. Financial means from the municipal budget sources that Gacko radio station received this year were reduced by 12% in comparison with the amount they had received last year from the same financing source.

Bosiljka Glusac, Gacko radio general manager, confirmed that, as far as the total income this radio station has at the disposal, 80% of the money comes from the municipal budget sources, while Gacko radio receives 20% from their own commercial marketing and advertising sources.

Mrs. Glusac however warned that the decline of marketing money had been noted for the period of last ten years, because local legal entities / companies have been their main advertising and marketing clients on local Gacko radio station. She outlined that most of them have been facing very difficult financial situations, while many of them went bankruptcy or very simply forced to close down their business.

“Program scheme of Gacko radio includes

Due to reducing process of public incomes and very difficult situation for all local communities in Republic of Srpska, it has been noted that decreasing and insufficient amounts of money were planned and dispersed to local media houses.



A number of managers and directors of many local radio and TV stations that we spoke with, warned that certain rules, imposed by the CRA BiH, are almost impossible to follow and implement, because these are indeed too strict to follow, as far as small media houses are concerned.

the municipal affairs, events, covering the situation in the fields of economy, agriculture, politics, sport, culture and education. Radio has been particularly focused on the work and affairs at Gacko Thermal Power Plant, which is considered as economic giant in this municipality, because the majority of local people are employed and work there”, said the manager of this radio station.

Radio Gradiska operates in Gradiska municipality and its sole founder was Gradiska Municipality. Some BAM 200.000,00 is the amount allocated on an annual basis from the local municipal budget source and this amount is according to legal proceedings, deposited to the account of Public Establishment Radio Gradiska. Last year, the Municipality of Gradiska funded Gradiska radio with BAM 206.400, 00, said the officials from the Gradiska Municipality Financial Department.

Just as radio Gacko (and many other radio stations in BiH), this radio station’s news and information program also mostly covers the information about local affairs from the fields of politics, economy, sport and culture. Gradiska radio station issues Gradiska news bulletin (magazine) twice a year and the printing costs for this newspaper is also covered by the municipal budget money source with some BAM 6.500,00.

Municipality of Sokolac Assembly founded Sokolac Public Enterprise named “Info Centre” including the Sokolac Info Radio, which is a constituent part of this Info Centre and also the only public electronic media house in this particular municipality in Republic of Srpska. The radio has been broadcasting its radio program (on daily basis) from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. It does not operate on its own frequency; instead, it uses waves which are the property of Radio and Television of Republic of Srpska. Sokolac Info Radio, in its news and information program, follows all current affairs in Sokolac and the City of Istocno Sarajevo, especially in the following programs: “Novosti”, “Sokolacka hronika”, “Hronika grada Istocno Sarajevo” etc. Sokolac municipality officials outlined that Info Radio has been broadcasting economy based programs, including educational, cultural, sport, entertaining, youth, children and religious programs as well.

Sokolac newspapers are printed and issued monthly in Sokolac municipality. This printed edition mostly covers local affairs including the following: political affairs in Sokolac municipality, general situation in Republic of Srpska Forestry, because this particular company makes significant financial contribution, as far as the budget income is concerned, because they pay significant amount of tax money. Sokolac monthly newspaper also covers the subjects of education and culture.

Sokolac Info Centre Public Enterprise has 13 employees working on full time basis. Apart from the above mentioned papers, these employees also edit and administrate the official web site of Sokolac municipality, namely www.opstinasokolac.net. Sokolac Municipality funds Info centre with some BAM 150.000,00 from local municipal budget money.

From RTV centre to municipality without public media house

Development and scope of local media in Republic of Srpska mostly depend on finances deriving from municipal budget sources. According to this, we have the illustrated case in the city of Prijedor, where on one hand; Prijedor radio station; Prijedor Television and Kozarski vijesnik (weekly printed magazine) operate as part of Public Establishment Kozarski vijesnik. On the other hand, smaller and poorer municipality find very difficult to finance and fund local media houses.

For instance, there is not a single electronic media house in the municipality of Ljubinje in Herzegovina region. Ljubinje Glasnik, as the only printed magazine in this municipality is issued once a year and local municipality funds this project with some BAM 2.000,00 to BAM 3.000,00.

There are however more developed communities that have been functioning, operating and working for years without local public electronic media houses. Derventa is one of those places where the local Derventa based Association of Journalists and Reporters have been appealing for years and demanding from local governing official authorities to re-establish their local radio station which ceased working many years ago.

Local media houses, CRA (RAK) and sanctions

Local media houses are obliged to submit their work reports to local assemblies, since local assemblies are, in most cases, their founders. Still, electronic local media houses are directly responsible to Communication Regulatory Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CRA) as far as their work is concerned, because of the fact that it is the CRA that issues permits for program broadcasting, licenses for the use of frequency required etc. CRA is, on the other hand, entitled to impose sanctions and fines in case of violations of provisions deriving from the legal Code, including the rules of applicable broadcasting.

Free Media Help Line

Actual cases:

1. Duška Jurišić, a Federal Television female journalist: Hate speech based comment, including several offences and insults appeared on “Posteno”, a TV show face book profile. Duska Jurisic was a host of this TV show. Free Media Help Line sent a letter to Federal Police Authorities, considering them as competent and official police body in relation with this particular case. FUP replied by stating that the case had been forwarded to Sarajevo Canton Prosecutor’s Office for further proceeding.

2. BHT: After having announced the interview with Sebija Izetbegovic, a general manager of the Clinical Center of the University of Sarajevo, which was supposed to be broadcasted on Wednesday 25 Oct during night and prime time period at BHT, the interview was removed from TV program scheme and was thus not broadcasted, with no prior and official explanation by the BHT general management officials, including the explanation by the editing office officials as well. Members of the Board of Directors of the BH Association of Journalists issued a press release demanding the official explanation from Marijo Vrankic, a BHT general manager, requesting from him to release public announcement revealing thus the true reasons that resulted in the removal and non broadcasting of the above mentioned and previously announced upcoming interview.

3. Aid Mršić, JU TV SA journalist and editor: During the report making for TV SA Central News program, a female editor, associated by IP female editor, demanded from Aid Mrsic to change and alter the statement given by Damir Masic, a federal MP, before this statement was to be broadcasted. Free Media Help Line sent a pretest letter to TV SA director, including all associates involved of Public Enterprise TV Sarajevo, demanding their official explanation in relation with the circumstances deriving from the official Complaint submitted.

What represents a clear problem here is the amount of prescribed fines and sanctions and the maladjustment of rules imposed against small local media houses. A number of managers and directors of many local radio and TV stations that we spoke with, warned that certain rules, imposed by the CRA BiH, are almost impossible to follow and implement, because these are indeed too strict to follow, as far as small media houses are concerned. It was also pointed out and indicated, that the amount of imposed fines for certain rules violations are incredibly high, since many local media houses find these fines unbearably inconvenient.

Local governing authorities and their impact on program editing policies

Financing the work of local media houses from city / towns and municipal budget funds may have negative and undesired consequences as well: local governing official authorities often misuse the fact that local media houses are directly financed from the budget funds and this does make an impact on program editing policies. Employees / staff are in broadcasted programs, often forced to promote the work of local official authorities, while on the other hand, media staff are banned from making reports based on critics addressed to local administration institutions.

Milkica Milojevic, a female journalists with years of experience and also member of the Banjaluka Journalists’ Club Board of Directors, warned that it was the financing of local public media directly from city, town or municipal budget funds that created the situation where media freedoms and liberties, at local levels, were in very difficult situation and are accordingly jeopardized, comparing to the situation in the Entity and state public media services (houses), where the situation is quite different, in regard with this particular issue.

“The situation is even worse at local levels. The question is whether we can even talk about media in its origin and genuine meaning of the word. They (local media houses) are either on the edge of their persistence and survival, or they have to conduct the politics – based program influenced by certain governing political parties at local levels”, claimed Mrs. Milojevic.

How much freedom and liberty do journalists working for local media houses have?

As part of this story framework, many journalists working for local media houses have been contacted. They were expected to talk and express their opinions about work conditions they experience and eventual pressures they have been imposed with. Most of them refused to talk about this issue publically. A female journalist, working for local radio station in the southern part of Republic of Srpska, justified her refusal to publically speak about the situation in this particular media house, by stating that she was afraid that she may get sacked and lose her job, as this whole matter is tied and linked with local political affairs in this specific local community.

“Last year, new political party won the elections in our town. Consequently, new governing official authorities dismissed many former public company managers and appointed new managers closed to them instead. All journalists that had already been working in this media house were ever since looked at in different way. I somehow have a feeling that we can no longer be trusted by our new management”, claimed this lady.

“We had been put under lot of pressure, mostly by the local governing officials, even before the political party took over, however during the most recent period, the situation went from bad to worse and I assume that the reason for this is the fact that the budget money planned for financing local community media house was rapidly reduced and this decrease in financing continued year by year”, she concluded.

Local communities and private media

Marketing represents main source of income for private local media houses. Still, financial ties and connections between local communities and private media houses often occur through this kind of marketing. The city of Banjaluka officials had, for instance, in 2014 and 2015 dispersed over BAM 100.000.00 and this amount had been distributed to both public and private media houses for announcing public invitations to bids (tenders), including commercial advertisements, news, information etc. City of Bijeljina also financed public and private media houses for information and advertising services with BAM 230.000, 00 in 2014 and BAM 338.000,00 in 2015. Interestingly enough, but also expected by many, during the distribution of these amounts, most of the allocated money went into the accounts of media houses whose program editing policies were closest to local governing political parties and accordingly biased.

The future of local media houses in RS

It is the inevitable fact that local communities in Republic of Srpska tend to reduce

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Taking into consideration that most local media houses mainly depend on financing from municipal / town / city budget money being dispersed and distributed accordingly, biased broadcasted programs aimed to “serve” the ruling governing majority are often identified and recognized.

the money distribution planned and scheduled for local media houses and their work, which consequently caused the cessation of work and closing down of tens of local media houses since the end of war in BiH until present. Private local media houses are also experiencing difficult period, because the incomes they acquire and earn from commercial marketing advertising is also reduced and decreasing, which again comes as a result of the economy decline at local levels.

Common sense question accordingly follows: Will local media houses be able to sustain?

One of their surviving opportunities may be seen in using new technologies that enable more affordable program production and broadcasting, but on the other hand, they should try to adapt to new formats required by their recipients. Nevertheless, the adoption process of local media houses, in order to fulfil the requirements of their viewers and listeners, should not be limitless to that extent, because the entertaining program scheme should as a result, not jeopardize their informative and educational primary functions. Therefore, local media houses, in order to sustain and survive, do require further support by municipalities and cities / towns in their communities, because regional or republic orientated media house shall never be able to approach and analyse the problem in some local community, as oppose to local media house, able to do this.

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City Mayor and Local Governing Official Authorities media tailoring

By: Velida Kulenović

Tailoring of media by City Mayor and Local Governing Official Authorities, despite their legal duty to serve the public that, by the way, have been financing media houses throughout BiH, has altogether become some kind of a tendency also considered recently as very popular on local level. Moreover, this kind of tendency has never been identified as unknown (incognito); instead it was rather the “privatization” process of local media services that has become a common practice with worrying scope and so far, there have been no conventional mechanisms in order to prevent the spreading of such occurrences. Local media services have neither tools nor techniques to protect themselves from this. Reasons supporting this particular thesis include the following; firstly, most local media houses mainly depend on financing means deriving from municipal (town, city or cantonal) budget money dispersing; secondly, directors and editors are usually appointed by local (city, town or cantonal) governing official authorities; thirdly, media staff are not considered as universally unique and fourthly, there have been no public critic released (appropriately) regarding this issue.

This actually represents the image of local media services that have been unable to protect their independent work and operations. Unfortunately, more and more popular plurality of local and city councils made no contribution, as far as the creation of the environment for independent work and operation of media is concerned, allowing thus free work for media staff. Taking into consideration that most local media houses mainly depend on financing from municipal / town / city budget money being dispersed and distributed accordingly, biased broadcasted programs aimed to “serve” the ruling governing majority are often identified and recognized. Looking at the internet headlines and programs broadcasted and uploaded on local radio and TV stations in Zenica – Dobož Canton, we, as independent audience, can easily discover and recognize which political party represents the official majority ruling group (rtvze.ba, radiokakanj.co.ba). Bearing in mind that managers and directors have directly been appointed by city and/or municipal mayors, they supervise (through their editors), and ensure that no conflict with city and municipal mayor would eventually emerge.

The cases and samples in ZDK and USK, when the future of media and staff salaries / wages was in jeopardy, only confirmed and proved the scope of impact and the influence by local governing official authorities imposed against these local media houses. It also outlined that independent or rather dependent work by local media services, had been (dis)allowed. In the case of RTV Zenica, the election female manager “obstructed” the financing of this local media service. At the same time, when the payments were three months late (delayed), journalists and media staff, continued to follow the work with local governing official authorities and report from City Council meeting assembly and regular sessions.

In this particular case, the Association of BiH Journalists reacted and encouraged the local city governing officials that financing of this media service must not be conditioned by appointing female manager to the position of general directors. Also, in this case, a complete lack of reaction by syndicate / work union officials in this media



Passing laws and regulation of transparency of ownership in media is necessary and required because it would not just formally define and array this particular segment of media space, instead it would open the possibility for different models of financing, providing thus the public with an opportunity to, along with getting familiar with ownership structure, become aware about creators and information sources, including media messages.

house as they have been expected to raise their voice "loud" in order to protect the rights of media staff, has been noted and outlined.

Cantonal Assembly Members like television

There is another example, in the territory of Zenica – Doboj Canton, which clearly outlines the will and determination of elected representatives / citizens (in the Assembly of Zenica – Doboj Canton) to have full control over media houses. Zenica television made full coverage of the Zenica – Doboj Canton assembly session meeting, however these reports were prepared and released with short and reduced discussions.

The "purchasers" did not like this because these reports were broadcasted on local television stations covering the area of all 12 municipalities in Zenica – Doboj Canton.

Bearing in mind that this was considered as excellent opportunity to send a message to potential future voters, particularly in pre – election period, which was used by their representatives so they could hold a discussion, raise questions and reply to comments, another television commercial channel which made full recording at the assembly meeting sessions, without any reactions and intervention, which additionally distributed these video recorded reports to local TV stations, which again had signed contracts for media reporting with Zenica – Doboj Canton. Assembly meeting sessions often last for nearly 8 hours (and sometimes even longer than 8 hours) and even before the daily agenda is established, defined and set up, representatives usually waste several hours discussing about mutual affairs, issues, questions, replies and they also often respond to replies addressed to them. This is why assembly representatives were convinced that their public addressing would be crucial, so they could represent themselves in best possible form in front of their potential voters, making thus political points and making political benefit out of this situation. There is no official television station in Zenica – Doboj Canton; instead there are several local TV channels. According to several assembly representatives in Zenica – Doboj Canton Assembly, cantonal TV houses should indeed be established on cantonal level as soon as possible.

"RTV Zenica should become a regional leader, as far as public informing is concerned, and should even receive financial support from cantonal budget sources", stated Ismet Sarajlic (SBB).

"I shall intercede that this TV house should receive cantonal status. Media financing shall be transparent, but political impact on media is rather invisible, meager and tenuous. There have been accusations that certain media houses had even been blackmailed. As far as the media blackmailing is concerned, last case occurred in Zenica City Council, where RTV Zenica should have been deprived of financial support or financial support should have been reduced imposing thus this media with pressure, indeed confirmed that this media house could become a subject to manipulation, claimed Sarajlic.

"According to my information sources, I reckon that people in Zepce municipality are pretty well informed. We have no local TV and this represents a serious problem for this area as I believe that media financing in Zepce is transparent, said Ivo Tadic (HDZ).

"All modern media houses provide public with news and information, but I don't know how many information and news get to the public, because people receive more than enough news and information; namely they read headlines, titles, articles, texts, posts and seem to be more interested in comments posted rather than the article / text content. What media can do in this case is to formulate headlines that may attract and intrigue the viewers to read them. How can anyone talk about transparency if we receive no information about the number of citizens in our country that regularly pay RTV tax fees", said Samir Lemes (DF). He is surprised with the scope of enthusiasm regarding the work that media houses conduct and implement because, according to him, "the marketing share in such small market is insufficient for financing, considering the great number of media houses existing and operating in our country.

Too many political parties had been governing here so it has been hard to detect which political party is actually ruling at present and who or which political group represents the opposition, so it is generally difficult to estimate and evaluate the scope of impact and pressure that certain media houses have been imposed with (by political parties)".

Political influence, regardless of how invisible it may appear, has become evident and apparent as it has made impact on media financing processes, particularly on local levels. Unfortunately, the public influence still remains insufficient. Former program scheme councils, contact shows, letters by listeners and viewers have been changed with comments and likes in online media that prevailed in media field and that are used, especially by younger generation, more often and are in fact easier to handle and use. Electronic and online media that are followed through mobile smart phone are easier to handle and use and the possibility of having impact on public is more

efficient; media programs are being censored by local or cantonal governing official authorities and media houses may accordingly consequently become subject to outer impact and dependence.

On the other hand, there are private / commercial media houses whose work is based on service principle; the amount of money provided would normally determine the amount of information provided in return. Ownership structure in this segment, as well as in online media, has not been transparent which would again open room for further manipulations, enabling thus different violation of codes and laws regulation in media field.

Passing laws and regulation of transparency of ownership in media is necessary and required because it would not just formally define and array this particular segment of media space, instead it would open the possibility for different models of financing, providing thus the public with an opportunity to, along with getting familiar with ownership structure, become aware about creators and information sources, including media messages. Naturally, media ownership should accordingly define the users (consumers) and the impact imposed on them. Media ownership regulating is also significant for research and survey, regarding the role and media impact in our country.

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Meaning and role: Do we need local media?

By: Vera Soldo

A decade ago and as a result of internet developing era in BiH, it was almost impossible to imagine that every major place or city (town) in BiH would have tens of online media houses operating and almost every village would have its “official” web page or local web site.

Printed media houses, due to expensive and costly production have, on one hand, been lacking behind and losing the persistence race in media field, including radio stations, while on the other hand, almost everyone has had a “smart phone”.

Consequently, almost every single person, out of 3.8 billion internet users on our planet has access to all kinds of different information, including, for instance, local affairs in Sipovaca, Veljaci or Vitina small villages in Herzegovina.

The importance of local media houses has often been neglected because many people would believe that they (local media houses) have released “less important” news, events, affairs from a local community, since they were mainly focused on news and affairs deriving from “high level politics” or globally available news as well. This approach is however completely wrong and incorrect.

We have often been in a position to find out and discover what the new American president has stated and what the reaction to this statement, by his Russian colleague, would be. On one hand, we have also been able to find out what happened in France or Germany, and on the other hand, we were unaware of what happened in our local community. These local affairs may include a variety of events including the organization of mutual and community – based cleaning of local river banks from garbage or if the local farmers had been satisfied with harvesting and crops and also, what did people in our local community tend to instigate or encourage etc.

Local media houses have often reflected authentic media picture of local community where one of the last surviving symbol of so called affirmative (positive) and good news in the pandemic world of tabloid – based news (trash news) remained. They would often report, in rather brave manner, about negative social affairs, including criminal affairs, corruption and bribery from their local communities and many journalists, even from bigger news agencies can envy these local community journalists and their work.

Journalists working for local media houses are often journalists – volunteers and working in such media houses has sometimes been indeed dangerous and risky, especially in communities where common public thinking that anyone can assault, attack and even beat the journalists because he / she dared to do something, as this is still considered as commonly accepted

Local media houses have often reflected authentic media picture of local community where one of the last surviving symbol of so called affirmative (positive) and good news in the pandemic world of tabloid – based news (trash news) remained. They would often report, in rather brave manner, about negative social affairs, including criminal affairs, corruption and bribery from their local communities and many journalists, even from bigger news agencies can envy these local community journalists and their work.

The significance of local media operating houses is also often identified and recognized by local community that may provide financial support and fund them as well. This kind of support is crucial for their persistence, survival and existence, as long as this support does not cause obstruction and limitation to their work and media freedom and liberty in the first place.



The governing institutional budgets do not allow us to have clear view regarding what specific amounts are granted to media houses, taking into consideration that these budgets are often designated and outlined under the “miscellaneous” items. These budgets are also often listed under the cumulative budget lines (such as “other services”, “subventions”, “grants” etc) and the names of media houses using these budget funds are even less visible.

opinion. A conclusion that pluralism does exist amongst local media house and that each and every local media house has its own readers or viewers (even thousands of them) follows the prior.

The significance of local media operating houses is also often identified and recognized by local community that may provide financial support and fund them as well. This kind of support is crucial for their persistence, survival and existence, as long as this support does not cause obstruction and limitation to their work and media freedom and liberty in the first place.

However, taking into consideration that this is about small local media houses, the possibility of political and other associated pressures is greater as well. This influence would additionally impact the readers and viewers thus accomplishing certain political goals. This represent rather significant issue not concerning local media houses only, but also concerning big ones as well (private media houses and often public media houses too).

However, despite all of the above mentioned, pluralism which exists in local media houses in BiH may often be compared to media houses in more developed countries and is necessary in local communities. At the same time, local community should indeed support their work and should accept undesired critics as personal correction tool in terms of having responsibility with the purpose of creating a common improvement of public existence in their scope of work. But, isn't this the sign that I abhorred into the area of utopia here?

Interview with Sanela Hodžić, researcher and editor of media reports, Mediacentar Sarajevo

Interviewed by Arman Fazlić

Q: What kind of existing legal regulation regarding media financing from public budget funds and what law provisions are included at different governing levels in BiH?

A: There is no particular legal framework for media financing, although there are different legal law provisions that partially relate to media financing, especially in terms of transparency of these relations. Additionally, transparency budget norms are, for instance, defined through Entity legal and law provisions regarding budgets, and transparency issues and questions regarding public enterprises budgets (including local media houses) are partially defined through law and legal provisions applied through public enterprises. Transparency norms are related to public budget announcing, they are also related to reports on budget implementation, use of reserve means and funds, decision on loans etc on official web pages of certain governing bodies (Law on Budgets of FBiH), that is, Official Gazette (Law on Budget of FBiH and Law on Budget System in RS), and they also related to announcing the information regarding financial structure for public media houses (pursuant to laws of public enterprises).

However, the governing institutional budgets do not allow us to have clear view regarding what specific amounts are granted to media houses, taking into consideration that these budgets are often designated and outlined under the “miscellaneous” items. These budgets are also often listed under the cumulative budget lines (such as “other services”, “subventions”, “grants” etc) and the names of media houses using these budget funds are even less visible. Legal norms related to public procurements are also important in terms of media financing context.

Q: Is there a difference in procedures and allocation / distribution of public budget money to private and public media houses? Are there more precised, more thorough and detailed researches and surveys conducted and implemented, indicating to malignant trends and failures in laws?

A: There are different forms of media financing from public sector, starting with regular public media budget financing, including Entity level press agencies, municipal, city and cantonal media houses, through grant allocation / distribution for private and public media houses, to different contracts with media houses regarding the covering of local governments and their work, including the promotion of local issues, commercial advertising and similar financial relations. In general, there are no substantial and mutual and commonly defined norms and procedures in these financing forms and these decisions are mostly considered a matter of discretion for each and every individual governing authority, which is entitled to grant

Speaking about public media financing is actually speaking about pre-determined and pre-defined procedures under the competences of local governing authorities and most of the time, similar budgets grants are approved for further allocation and distribution for given public media houses from year to year. However, emerging of certain fluctuations is possible as well in cases where budget cuts are introduced but also fluctuations occur during dissents on political basis.



particular financial means. Transparency of individual procedures of separation is even more questionable in this sense. Decisions on media financing are normally passed by political bodies that necessarily withdraw the questions of eventual instrumentalising and manipulation of these funds for particular interests.

Speaking about public media financing is actually speaking about pre-determined and pre-defined procedures under the competences of local governing authorities and most of the time, similar budgets grants are approved for further allocation and distribution for given public media houses from year to year. However, emerging of certain fluctuations is possible as well in cases where budget cuts are introduced but also fluctuations occur during dissents on political basis. For the latter, we had a recent case at RTV Zenica when the budget amount for this particular media house was reduced, followed by a complete financial cut, deriving as a result of disagreement of city mayor regarding the re-appointing of a female general manager in this media house.

Naturally, on one hand we have problems related directly to political manipulations in terms of appointing the management members in public media houses, however, it is humiliating that such financial conditioning (or to some extent even blackmailing) of public media house is even possible in reality.

Aimed provisions, provisions regarding criteria and conditions for allocation and distribution of state help in FBiH, define criteria for allocation and distribution of public media help, but these criteria is not precisely defined according to general requirements such as “public interest service”, “national program representation” and the existence of an independent body that follows the public service providing. We cannot find similar criteria in Republic of Srpska in regard with state level allocation and distribution to private media houses. In reality, forms and financial criteria are different and in rare cases, when specific rules are passed as far as this issue is concerned, these criteria mostly comprehend technical criteria (including the registration on the territory of community, adequate capacities etc); while, on the other hand, program criteria are defined such as “business and entrepreneur affirmation”, “moral values”, “civil society”, “strengthening of critical consciousness”, “community promotion” in different areas, so the quantity of information regarding local administration and local governing level announced in previous year. These kinds of rules, applied at governing levels where they had been passed, altogether represent a crucial step forward in regulating media financing issue, even though the criteria included here are not precisely defined and media valuing pursuant to these criteria remain questionable either.

Q: To what extent do public institutions respect legal regulations predicting allocation and distribution of financial means and paying media houses for services they provide?

A: Taking the deficiency of these procedures into consideration, it is difficult to talk about to what extent legal procedures are actually applicable and can be implemented in reality. Available secondary sources point out to eventual and possible formal interpretation of the above mentioned criteria for state help for public media houses, where, for instance, the fact that media regulator does exist (and operates in its full capacity), namely Communication Regulatory Agency (CRA) is used as sufficient tool in order to make conclusion that there is a supervising body which can decide whether certain media houses operate to the benefit of general public interest. In terms of public procurements, audit reports and analysis, indicated and outlined the occurrence of excessive use of direct contracts, negotiating procedures and agreements on coproduction which as a result appeared in order to avoid open procurement procedures thus diminishing transparency system in general. Therefore, it would be required and necessary to have criteria precisely defined regarding the state help pursuant to well – planned concept of public interest and enabling excessive use of exceptions deriving from public procurement procedures related to media services.

Q: To what extent can selective treatment in decision making and in regard with public funds allocation and distribution damage society, public interests, media and particularly media professionals?

A: All of the above mentioned media houses suffer from serious lack of transparency, unclear criteria in regard with general public interest, lack of protection of instrumentalising and manipulations, lack of independent decision – making institutional and official bodies and finally, lack of monitoring of legitimacy to such practice.

Finally, biggest damage as far as this issue is concerned, may emerge from the fact that no efforts had been made in order to make these assignments public interest instruments and the final effect of these assignments, upon quality of journalism and public requirements for communications, consequently still remain questionable.

The state is disabled to apply and implement regulations according to its obligations towards international conventions, that is, to prevent excessive domination

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of individual interests and to ensure and provide conditions for effective pluralism. Besides, citizens are not provided with sufficient, proper and adequate information regarding financial interests in media sector, particularly regarding allocation, distribution and effects of public means.

In networks of different interests and relationships whose legitimacy and transparency is questionable, media professionals are left with limited space for journalism autonomy.

Q: What is the official stand and opinion of BiH judiciary system regarding the allocation and distribution of public means to media houses in comparison with neighboring countries and wider? How can we create new conditions for fair market where all media houses should have equal treatment?

A: Many international recommendations are directed towards the increasing of transparency and legitimacy of media financing, including for instance, Resolution 1636 on indicators for media in democracy systems, Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (2008), stating clearly that media ownership and economical influences on media must be made more transparent and additionally, implementation of the regulation against the monopoly – based concentration, including the measures promoting media pluralism. EU guidelines supporting media freedoms and media integrity in joining countries 2014 – 2020 also encourage the announcing of scope and share of public means in every single media houses involved.

In developed democracy systems these issues and questions are solved in different ways, but in reality many efforts are made to advance transparency (for example Law On Transparency on Media Support and Advertising in Austria), advance criteria of state help – usually where the tendency is to support printed media houses that face certain difficulties in their work, but also a non – profit media houses and alternative platforms assuming that particular functions of public interests and that criteria should be defined more precisely, minimizing arbitrarily decision making in return. The establishing of expert commissions and/or an attempt to develop the system of parity of different interests, as part of bodies that make decisions in media financing, represent yet another significant step towards the guarantee of legitimacy of financing procedures. In neighboring Croatia, we had attempts of advancing the responsibilities of media receiving state help, in terms of media houses applying for state help, where they had been required to introduce their Status regulating the relations between journalists and media and the guarantee of their complete autonomy, including the designation of media contents whose producing is supported by co-financing from public sector. At the end, without monitoring of media financing from public budgets, it is difficult to make conclusions regarding legitimacy of these procedures and final effects in context of communication required by citizens and general public.

All of the above mentioned elements are considered important as far as the advanced financing policies are concerned, and some of them may be applicable and implemented in BiH as well. The discussions regarding these issues is crucial for media sector, but for wide public as well, and to find best possible ways to, through the development of legal and regulatory framework, conduct and implement these financial forms since they should be serving public interests by all means.



Protection of freedom of expression in local communities – journalists’ protection from local powerful people

By: Miro Pejić

Freedom of expression in BiH is still not on a satisfactory level and journalists are often exposed to various kinds of pressure, even including direct threats. This is confirmed and verified through special reports released by numerous international organizations that follow and monitor global situation as far as freedom of expression is concerned. Many cases of direct jeopardizing and endangering of journalists’ lives have been reported, including threats directed to people who had been talking openly about certain and concrete criminal occurrences, including corruption and other associated local deviations, misuses, ignoring by governing officials to make certain actions in order to prevent this from happening and the appearance of conflict of interest as well.

Journalists working in small areas and communities, where most locals know each other, find their work rather scabrous, complex and often dangerous, as far as their own safety is concerned, including the safety of their families and their

Professional, engaged and committed journalists want to do their job properly and fulfill their duties, fighting at the same to discover and get genuine and true facts and provide public with truthful information, are left on their own and often have neither support nor protection from official governing authorities.

Instead of being provided with particular information by official inspectors, members of supervising and monitoring boards, judiciary officials, tax office authorities or other official authorities, journalists must investigate, conduct research do their job and write about system failures, inaction, obstruction, tax evasion, corruption, nepotism and other illegal actions.

property as well. Journalism has become significantly dangerous, but has also become more responsible – based, because journalists are expected to point out, outline and highlight crucial and key the problems and to deal with them, particularly in society such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, society where most institutions fail to perform their work and fulfill their duties; society where, according to reports by many non – governmental and international organizations, high level of corruption has emerged and is still present, including nepotism and political party obedience and loyalty by many individuals and employment of those considered as suitable and political party – biased people.

Journalists have been working under such conditions for decades, however, local public response failed (it had never appeared) or in folk's word, people “got used to this” and ignore any news that may be considered as undesired and negative news on daily basis. One affair on exposed criminal deeds is usually covered up by (apparently) “more interesting” news and the information providing would thus remain on a local daily news level. There are no responses and no actions taken by official authorities and even general public often remain silent. Criminal actions remain unprocessed and penalties for such actions are rare which additionally encourages local criminals to continue with illegal actions consequently making profit and getting rich. Unfortunately, these affairs often include those who should, in the first place, obstruct and prevent any illegal actions pursuant to official functions they perform.

Many involved in the above mentioned crimes have recognized themselves in different reports, stories, articles and posts, although the authors never mentioned their full names because they were not sure about their personal details. They managed to obstruct reporters from further investigation reporting and covering specific affairs in order to re-direct the attention of general public to another issues thus protecting themselves from responsibilities they had been held for. Covering particular stories journalists have often been unaware about who may have been tied with illegal actions which would additionally present them (journalists) with problems including disturbing and putting themselves in awkward positions where people, whom they had never mentioned in their reports and whom they had never met before, approach them and express their anger because they believe that reports were directed against them for no reason. Because of them, general public hardly or almost never receives necessary information, since they intentionally hide them screening thus their illegal actions and criminal offences.

Official authorities often obstruct journalist in doing their job

Journalists writing and outlining social deviations and criminal occurrences, expose themselves to misfortunate situations until they get particular, required and necessary facts relevant to their reports, stories and articles. Additionally, they jeopardize their families and, because of that, they sometimes jeopardize their jobs with their employers, whereas criminals often remain intact by all means. With an exception of few honest and loyal individuals at all state system levels and governing levels, most “experts” fail to perform their duties and do not do their job properly and on one hand, do not implement legal empowerment and duties (as they should) neglecting thus completely their professional and social responsibility, while their conscious, on the other hand, remains a mystery. Professional, engaged and committed journalists want to do their job properly and fulfill their duties, fighting at the same to discover and get genuine and true facts and provide public with truthful information, are left on their own and often have neither support nor protection from official governing authorities.

Instead of being provided with particular information by official inspectors, members of supervising and monitoring boards, judiciary officials, tax office authorities or other official authorities, journalists must investigate, conduct research do their job and write about system failures, inaction, obstruction, tax evasion, corruption, nepotism and other illegal actions.

In many cases the above mentioned or municipal officials disallow and disable media representatives to approach venues considered as interesting as far as public is concerned. Additionally, municipal and governing officials at all levels make “selection” in deciding which journalists’ team shall be allowed to record and report about particular events, venues or accidents and get information (facts) and which journalists’ team shall be deprived of approaching the above mentioned events, venues or accidents. By doing this, the officials refute the



Pressures imposed upon media representatives in local communities have different forms and tend to become more and more sophisticated, although direct, as most brutal and most vulgar pressures, still exist in reality.

Phone calls and disturbing, deliberate street encounters, open public threats and sometimes physical assaults against journalists represent some forms of direct pressures which jeopardize professional and human rights and endanger journalists' freedoms.

public from being provided with proper and objective information regarding certain events or actual problems, thus creating the suspicion regarding quality and good will of this work, that is, cover particular criminal and illegal actions from being exposed. New set of laws should certainly sort out this issue thoroughly. Unfortunately, due to the fact that law provisions have not been implemented properly, it is rather hard to expect that anyone could provide protection for journalists and create safe conditions regarding full safety and security for media representatives. The fight for this issue must continue in terms of allowing legal freedom of expression and information access deriving from all trades and work spheres through the implementation of legal provisions. Public have the right to know about social affairs and to get information regarding all public figures and bodies, including official institution representatives that are obliged to respect this public right as they should also assist journalists in providing public with objective, proper and beforehand information.

Different forms of direct and indirect pressure

Pressures imposed upon media representatives in local communities have different forms and tend to become more and more sophisticated, although direct, as most brutal and most vulgar pressures, still exist in reality.

Phone calls and disturbing, deliberate street encounters, open public threats and sometimes physical assaults against journalists represent some forms of direct pressures which jeopardize professional and human rights and endanger journalists' freedoms.

Individuals use meetings and mass rallies to launch and initiate conflicts with journalists. Under these circumstances, apart from threats they receive on regular and above mentioned basis, journalists' work is accordingly being diminished and they are often humiliated in public.

This kind of method is often used by powerful politicians that use mass rallies for personal promotion of their (so called) "capabilities, credits, benefits and power" that is, their "perfection and firmness".

There are many kinds of direct pressures imposed on journalist, including those jeopardizing and endangering their health condition, personal safety and eventually jeopardizing their lives.

It seems rather sad that those in charge with the implementation and protection of laws (in various fields of life and work) fail to provide protection for journalists in these areas; instead, journalists are left on their own in their combat for the sole truth. Instead of joining forces with journalists, assist them, support and help them in their investigation and work (including information providing and provided evidence in exposing particular affairs, criminal actions and illegal deeds committed); they rather inform doers and committers of the above mentioned deeds and criminal actions informing them that some "Mickey Mouse type of journalists are sticking their noses where they shouldn't (making investigations and survey where these criminals are or may be involved with)" and that they (investigative reporters) should be stopped from making any further steps in their investigations and survey.

These cases represent and display samples of depraving and destructing social system, and, according to most recent information, the number of these "informers" is increasing.

Direct and indirect threats and threats against family members, including friends, acquaintances, also persists thus jeopardizing family members and putting journalists' properties at stake. Also, journalists receive threats of getting sacked from work (losing their jobs), threats that local media houses may get shut down, threats regarding redundancies (or some other and similar kinds of pressures and blackmailing) present journalists in small local communities with serious problems, although they simply want to remain professional in performing their work and duties despite "miserable" wages they earn most of the time. Disabling marital partners from getting employed elsewhere, imposing journalists' children with pressure in their schools, disallowing scholarships and acquiring other types of rights for other members of journalists' family members, altogether represent occurrences that many journalists have been facing continually. Powerful figures tend to have journalists under their direct control as on one hand their intention is to direct their work, and, on the other



hand, they try to distant and marginalize journalists socially and economically, putting their existence at stake or simply they manage to destroy their personal spirit completely.

In order to block their work and to apply certain amount of “discipline” and make journalists work according to instructions provided by either economic or mighty political local lobbies or individuals, media representatives (often referred to as “seventh force representatives”) are often compromised including their family members. Indirect forms of pressures are simply endless, inexhaustible, and indescribable and began to appear more and more sophisticated.

Loyal journalists are financially more stable and safe

Unfortunately, due to employing procedure in local media houses, mostly based on family ties or political party loyalty, instead of employment based on professional competences, those “journalists” in most cases chose easier way by expressing maximum loyalty and work in accordance to instructions or guidelines directed by their political or economically powerful figures. These journalists are accordingly awarded by receiving more money and having certain privileges, and nobody dared to disturbed them in their work and let alone to threaten them. In most local communities in BiH, journalists have been imposed with some kinds of pressures and they had to develop their own “defense mechanism”, build their professional and personal status in society, with no help provided by anyone, and to continue in doing their work and trying to remain independent and objective as much as they possibly can.

The scope of success would depend on personal virtues and skills, including personal character as well. Highly and shamefully low wages in this particular field brought journalists to the edge of their existence and many of them have been “forced” to sacrifice their professional ethic code in order to please and satisfy fundamental existential necessities and have to trade in professional ethic code for loyalty to political powerful figures and tycoons.

More discipline, order and improvement of material position

What kind of program can be edited and broadcasted by one or two persons? Who wants to have their own news paper and defined minimum number of employees and special staff and it is necessary to determine and define special conditions that new employees must possess and do journalists’ job?. Following the situation for years in this particular field, I have realized that insufficient number of skillful and experienced persons work in media houses which demoted and degraded journalism as occupation. These persons often “emerged as journalists” overnight through “familiar way” in some news papers and additionally become editors. They refuse to allow discussion with colleagues that do their work professionally at highest level resisting all pressure imposed against them. Also, the newly emerged editors appeared unfamiliar with editing office procedures and similar discussions, including joined talks (with their colleagues) regarding certain topics, themes and issues and how they should be implemented.

Journalists should focus more on the question of their own position and status, but they should also distance themselves from those who violate journalism code and professional ethics and use every opportunity to fight against persons that are not considered as professionals and person that become “journalists” overnight.

Impressum

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