**The authority, the media and the public in Bosnia and Herzegovina: In the face of unfulfilled expectations**

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Contrary to the theoretical assumptions and political practices of developed democracies, the authorities, the media and the public in Bosnia and Herzegovina are in a relationship of multiple negative influences. Instead of interacting with, criticizing and encouraging each other, agents of public communication (government, the media and the public) restrain, stifle and obstruct one another. It has become a practice since the first multi-party elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1990, with war distortions and political pathology of the post-war period.

**Authority: A failed democracy experiment**

The authorities in our country declare themselves democratic, verbally opting for the civilization and democratic values ​​of the modern world, advocating for freedom, equality, political pluralism, human rights, freedom of the media, thought and speech... However, the decades-long stagnation of Bosnian society in all spheres of life indicates a discrepancy between what is declared and what is real.

Shortly after the first multi-party elections in our country in November 1990, when the democratization of society, higher levels of individual and collective rights through political pluralism and strengthening of parliamentarism were expected, the brutal war brought aggression, genocide, destruction, killings and persecution. In the war chaos, alongside the ethnic, elements of religious conflict, ideological, war profiteering, as well as conflicts of rural and urban culture were manifested. There is little talk about this last type of conflict, although its effects are increasingly felt, from the end of the war to the present.

Instead of democracy, we got a failed democracy experiment. This can be seen through the suspension of democratic institutions, the principles of parliamentarism and representative democracy, in favour of partisanship in the electoral process, but also through the growing dominance of retrograde and defeated ideologies, clericalism and the rise of party oligarchies by devastating public goods, public money and funds, nepotism, corruption...

Government at the level of the State and the Entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), was not formed more than a year after the elections. This, unfortunately, best illustrates the rule of no accountability and all the pathology of political life, which has been growing steadily since the war to this day.

Such government shows tendencies towards an undemocratic, more precisely totalitarian way of governing, most often in association of ethno-nationalist parties with religious leaders and organizations.

Thus, instead of proclaimed secularism in the constitutional order of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it often practices clericalism or clerical nationalism. Religious leaders deal with political issues on a daily basis, agitate in election campaigns for their political leaders, and on the other hand, political leaders in their public appearances perform from religious positions, more precisely, from religious exclusivism and religious intolerance.

Such undemocratic political practice, in the face of low levels of provincial and submissive political culture, stifles any attempt at critical thinking, media freedom and free speech, and instead of political pluralism, promotes the unity, rule of ethnic, religious and party collectives, often very harshly and even violently. In such an undemocratic environment, a thinking individual is distressed as collateral damage, his or her voice cannot be heard, and his or her human rights are invoked in the face of party camels, different types of orthodox and fanatically exalted party collectives. This has a negative effect on professionalism in the media, reinforces the journalistic profession's dependence in politics, stifles any attempt to publicly resonate or criticize, through threats, intimidation and stifling freedom of thought.

**The media: Where the critical function disappeared**

The media in Bosnia and Herzegovina are most often insufficiently critical of the authorities and negative social phenomena. They are mainly characterized by non-objectivity, non-criticism and bias. Bias is particularly visible in the private media, very often in conjunction of media owners with party and political leaders. Often, party leaders set up their own media, or create party newsletters and party megaphones from existing media.

The winning parties, after the election, first seek to capture the public media and put them under their control. The influence of politics so far on the selection and removal of directors and editors in the public service broadcasting and entity broadcasters is unacceptable if we want to establish an impartial publicly funded broadcasting RTV system serving the public interest and broadcasting content that must be best served by within its own kind.

Unfortunately, the public service broadcaster, and in particular the entity broadcaster RTRS, has been at the service of party agitation and biased reporting for years through the skewed prescriptions of ruling party myopia. Objections can also be made to the public entity broadcaster of RTV FBiH, primarily by favouring the leaders of ruling political parties in the news program and the unequal status of party candidates in debates. Particularly striking is the example of an editor who was both a party member and an activist and later a party candidate in the Presidency elections.

Authorities have been obstructing the formation of the Public Broadcasting Consortium for years because they do not want to lose control of television, which is the most important media in election campaigns. Also, the government does not pass any of numerous missing laws in the media sphere.

We remind that the existing legal framework on the media is solid, albeit insufficient. The Law on Communications, the Law on Freedom of Access to Information, the Law on Defamation and the Law on Public Broadcasting Service, although unfortunately in the wake of European media practice, do not represent the free will of our citizens and the awareness and creativity of our legislators, but are imposed, more precisely imposed from the OHR. Nine types of laws are relevant in national legislation, and our legislation lacks the Law on Publicity of Work and Transparency of Ownership in the Media, the Law on Contracts and Companies, the Law on Advertising and the Law on the Dissemination and Use of Technologies.

Media legislation should be supplemented as soon as possible by these laws. In addition, it is necessary to work on the creation and adoption of media policies that would establish functional and legitimate models of public financing of the media, protect media freedoms, promote the public interest and professional standards of journalism, which is in the interest of the public and democracy.

According to recent data, there are 38 TV stations (terrestrial transmitters) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 26 of which are private, 12 public and 55 TV stations (other networks). Also, 134 radio stations (terrestrial transmitters) were registered, 71 of which were private, 63 public and 39 radio stations (other networks). There are also 12 on-demand media providers in our media market. In total, with 93 TV stations and 173 radio stations, as well as 12 on-demand broadcasters, we have 266 Radio and TV stations and 12 on-demand broadcasters, or 278 broadcasters.

Unlike many electronic media, we have few print media with a tendency to decrease circulation. Only eight dailies and more than a hundred different publications (magazines, newsletters) indicate the underdevelopment of print media and poor readership culture.

This is of particular concern if we think of a division of media roles, according to which "the radio announces an event, TV transmits it, the press clarifies it", which means that our public communication lacks a critical and explanatory function of the media, embodied above all in print editions. This is a major shortcoming of media production, which negatively affects the crystallization of public opinion and the formation of the public in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The new media communication situation in our country is characterized by a large, albeit unspecified number of portals, including more and more so-called "wild" portals, without impressum. This contributes to the spread of fake news, party agitation, persuasion, incitement, hate speech, trolling, which ultimately leads to irresponsible journalism. The negative impact of such unprofessional journalism on the public is prejudice, stereotypes, confusion and fear, which creates an ideal setting for regression of public reasoning and political manipulation.

There is no media register available in BiH in a "simple and transparent manner" as stated in the Council of Europe directives, which would provide complete media registers with ownership data and trace the origin of capital and hidden owners. There is no publicly available complete register of all media, private and public, radio stations, television, print and online media with impressum.

The public should be able to have equal and impartial access to basic media information so that they can evaluate the information, ideas and opinions disseminated by the media.

**The public: Can Internet activism tear us apart from lethargy?**

The public in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a public in a civil, political sense. It is ethno-territorially fragmented and in a state of latency. Because of this initial phase of development, due to the sporadic and weak expression of public opinion, it is often possible to hear in our public discourse that the public does not exist in our country. This is only partially true. In fact, there is public reasoning, but it is rare and is manifested only in special situations regarding extremely important social issues, or incidental situations that lead to anxiety. After responding, the public again returns to a state of rest, concealment. These are precisely the characteristics of an underdeveloped, latent public, opposed by a conscious and active public. The conscious public has an idea of ​​their dexterity and strength, while the active one often goes out to meet events. Conscious and active publics exert pressure on the media and the government for changes in social relations and daily life, unlike the latent public whose pressures on the media are generally weak and almost negligible.

The causes of the underdevelopment of the public in our country are different: from the lack of individual freedom of man of this region during the centuries of its turbulent history, through the undemocratic character of different forms of government through time, to the ignorance and ignorance of himself and others, low level of political culture, submissive mentality, but also poverty, fear that suppresses any kind of criticism and public speaking, and finally the dominance of collective identities (ethnic, religious, ideological), but also the underdevelopment of the media, democratic institutions and the inability to participate politically.

Political, administrative, media space in Bosnia and Herzegovina is shredded through entities, cantons and districts, through the dominance of ethno-religious identities, through ideological exclusivity, mythomaniacal creation of enemies everywhere and in everything, through the revival of the public sphere, in politics, education, health care, employment, the media, and finally – in a public discussion of important social issues.

Criticism has died down, dissonant voices have died down. Every now and then there is a thinking individual who does not stand up to booming social pathology, who does not consent to crime and corruption, who will not live under the pressure of collective, often mythical and distorted ideas about the world and life. But such a thinking individual is quickly denounced as ineligible and is dealt with even faster by grey party heads, religious leaders, an army of party hearers, and sometimes corrupt journalist scribes. The persecution of educated, integral personalities who think differently, but also the massive departure of people, are worrying.

The latest World Bank report "Migration and brain drain in Europe and Central Asia" states that almost half of the population or 49.5 percent has left Bosnia and Herzegovina so far. Among them, more than half are highly educated expatriates. In such conditions of departure, especially of highly educated people, the development of critical thinking and the strengthening of the public can particularly be discussed at all?

From the French Civil Revolution of 1789, through the European revolutionary period 1848 - 1853, and to this day, the media and the public led the struggle for a better and more prosperous society. The public gave the media power, and the media made the public an indispensable political factor. This kind of connection and synergistic action of the media and the public in our country only sporadically appeared and lasted for a short time, without leading to any major changes. Instead, the relationship between false expectations between the media and the public is almost constant.

This is one of the specifics of the communication situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Without stronger interaction between the media and the public, it is impossible to expect changes in our social life. A prerequisite for this is a greater media orientation towards the public rather than centres of power, encouragement for public speaking and polling, fostering critical thinking and creating authentic, informal public leaders. This requires a change in the media paradigm, a strengthening of civic activism and an awareness of the inevitability of change. In this sense, the communication activism of individuals and groups on social networks and the web, as well as the internet public, can pull out of the latency state the traditional public, relying on traditional mass communication media. Thus, new forms of publicity (internet publicity) could stimulate what was to precede them (traditional publicity). The barrier to this is the untapped democratic potential of the Internet, but even more so its misuse through trolling, fake news, incitement, and especially hate speech with pernicious consequences. This kind of communication environment does not have to remain that way forever.

Education in the field of political culture and media literacy, new media policies and better media legislation, raising the standard of journalism, the fight for freedom of thought and speech, civic activism and awareness of the need for change could, at last, fulfil the previously unfulfilled expectations of the media and the public.

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