

## THE TOPIC OF THE ISSUE

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CODE OF THE PROFESSION

### Disastrous lying for the motherland PERO JURISIN



**In the nineties lies were told, and hatred was spread out by speech, by words and by images. There always was a political pattern as a guideline for eager yes men journalists. Resistance to such approach was not a symbolic one. Primary responsibility for exposing hate speech and its promoters in the recent past, and also those of today, lies with the journalists and their professional association; they should constantly remind the public of what they had been doing and with what disastrous consequences.**

#### Introduction

When we evaluate the responsibility which the media, actually the journalists, bear in regard to war crimes, we should in the first place comprehend their role in the disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia, because the war was a part of it. In other words, we should answer the question whether there was a gap – and if it did exist, how big it was – between the proclaimed and generally accepted principles of the journalist profession on the one hand and that what the media and the journalists had been doing, on the other. Namely, did this gap produce negative effects ranging from the morally unacceptable ones up to the fact that this did instigate crimes, or was this gap itself a crime? To put it in a wording used by journalists – did they respect the facts, did they try to view them from various angles, and did they present them in an objective and impartial way? Hence, when writing a report or a comment, were they searching for truth as the fundamental principle of the profession, and were they conscious of their role in creating the public opinion, as well as of their responsibility in regard to creating influence?

If these criteria are our starting points, then already at first glance it is clear that a big number of journalists and the media did not adequately react to this eternal challenge of journalism – either as professionals, or as human beings. This is why Zarko Puhovski says that every analysis of the beginning of the war and its causes, as well as the analysis of the consequences of the war, must deal with the issue of mass support; it was mass support which enabled the nationalist leaders to mobilize, in emotional terms, a big percentage of members of one's own nationality.

#### Roots

Loss of professional distance in regard to events, to the ethics of public speech and culture of dialogue, as well as political and also every other kind of partiality, have always been present in our region. These are no specialty of the ex-Yu region, although due to historical, cultural and political circumstances they do have some specific features. The escalation of crisis in the territory of SFRY led to an escalation of these features particularly at the end of the 80-ies and the beginning of the 90-ies, making their echo very much present today as well, and affirming the words of Miroslav Krleža: "Only our pursuits are continuing. This is the constant. We have a continuous and irrevocable spirit of banditism. The law of the knife." – wrote the big writer far back in the thirties of the previous century.

One of the roots of the mentioned specifics lies in the system existing until 1990, when the media were under less or more control, or even strict control of the government. Control was carried out by editors, who were appointed by the politicians, and the journalists were defined as workers in the socio-political field, by which their responsibility for possible inadequacies in their writings was set in advance. The fact that they were given significance because they were "political intellectuals dealing with daily issues" resulted in having many of them hastily formulate conclusions on a given subject, in defending standpoints without deeper analysis and drawing one-sided conclusions, positive or negative alike. In one word – opportunism. Instead of introducing democratization, the decentralization of the system at the end of the 70-ies and the beginning of the 80-ies actually only replaced one center of power with many (republic) centers, within the national states. In a way, opportunism was thus also decentralized. So, in mutual frictions the ruling structures were increasingly using national connotations, inciting also the media under their control to do so. At the same time, due to a certain liberalization of the society, in part of the media there were "inconvenient advances". Namely, due to high levels of ideologization some of the media, just like some of the journalists, were starting their observations with "visionary ideal goals", putting into question the capability of individuals in the administration, and even the government itself,

to offer answers for a number of increasingly present societal contradictions. In the daily political practice the result was the punishing of journalists. At the end of the 80-ies the editorial board of the weekly Danas from Zagreb became known as such an example, although at that time there was a widespread opinion that the journalists were writing in this weekly what the party leadership of Croatia did not want to (or did not dare) say in public.

### Opportunism

When in the year 1990 the public sphere was finally "emotionalized", which made impossible any rational discussion, the room for "substantial distinction between the private and public life ... of the citizens and nationals" disappeared. So we got a situation in which, as Boris Buden says, "champions of opportunism" became "honored and respected members of society, not in spite of their demonstrated opportunism, but exactly because of it". Does anybody still remember how Vice Vukojevic spoke from the rostrum of the Croatian Parliament of partisans as criminals, thugs and murderers, whilst the son of a warrior killed in the battle over River Sutjeska, who actually had built his political carrier on the account of his father's partisanship, was presiding without reaction. However, not only did he not react, the media also made no mention of this. The end result was that "the most reliable barometer of somebody's patriotism was to manifest the spirit of intolerance", which the journalist of Vecernji list Dunja Ujevic eternalized in the phrase: "If necessary, I will lie for the motherland!" As colleague Vlado Rajic said, "state-building" was given priority over professionalism, the national over the civic, and beliefs over the truth. The fact that the Social-Democratic Party, and particularly its leadership, has made a distance from almost its entire historic heritage, as well as from the Serbs who were generally labeled as key enemies of Croatian state-building, made it easier for the journalists to also deviate in this direction.

So, in the nineties lies were told, and hatred was spread out by speech, by words and by images. There always was a political pattern as a guideline for eager yes men journalists. Do we need to remind of texts on Masonic and worldwide plots, which were increasing phobia with the aim to homogenize against enemies of all kinds? There are countless examples to this effect, as well as countless journalists who felt incited to overdo and go beyond these set frameworks. Some of them understood this as opportunity for profiting and who knows for what else. Certain is only one thing, that justifications like this one by Robert Pauletic, that "we had to do so because such were the times", can accept nobody with common sense. When the "sacred issue" was at stake, nothing was sufficiently sacred not to be misused or labeled as hostile, i.e. traitorous. There pencils were "killing, leaving people jobless, destroying their families". Therefore, Marinko Bozic's ST is today, too, serving as the "ideal pattern" behind which are hiding, unfortunately, many who had committed equally horrible things. Vedrana Rudan was speaking about ST, but she was having in mind all similar examples: "to sign those texts, to be editor of such media even for one hour in your life, this is not a mistake, it is a state of mind". According to Srdjan Vrcan, "we speak here of authors who in a way were second-class actors in the political drama which Tudjman's variety of Croatian nationalism had produced; in this drama they were not mere walk-ons, but rather had an important role in propagating and popularizing nationalist ideology. Basically, they were adding tissue to the ideological skeleton of Croatian nationalism as the political leadership created it, and they were thus consciously assisting this political ideology to get closer to everyday speech and everyday life".

### Resistance

Still, there was resistance to such an approach. That it was not a symbolic one illustrate the "attacks" of the authorities upon the media. In numerous media journalists were purged if they did not want to abide by this ethnic imperative of a state-building character, by which only "our side" is based upon genuine ethical values. Hundreds of them were expelled from Croatian Television, from Vjesnik; Glas Slavonije and TV Marjan in Split were occupied with the use of arms. The new regime needed those who would unreservedly speak out what the regime wanted to hear, or will keep silent on what the authorities do not want to be written or spoken about. Danko Plevnik sees this within the context of the first of the three "media wars" which the journalists were fighting in those times: "This was media war against the media belonging to the aggressor against Croatia, in which some journalists were ready to lie in the name of the people, whereas the others believed that the people was ready for the truth. So, the first option was represented by Vjesnik, Vecernji list, HTV and OTV." Here was also ST, then Hloverka Novak Srzic's Danas, Hrvatski vjesnik from Vinkovci, with the caption "Serbs, damn you, wherever you might be", and later also Slobodna Dalmacija and Nedjeljna Dalmacija which became almost the main leaders of the pogrom in media, particularly over the Muslims, both those in Bosnia-Herzegovina and those who have immigrated to Croatia. The damage done was twofold and long-lasting. Apart from "removing" good journalists from the authors' lists, the newly introduced cadres did not have good mentors, and all the media can still feel the consequences.

In such an ambience of insufficient and often controversial information from which it was difficult to grasp either the truth or the entire picture of events, the Croatian News Agency has also played a significant role by filling in the gaps when the "state-building" media were not able to do so. The

illustration of its credibility is the record in "refuted" news. The remaining news related mainly to transferring statements given by the state "leadership". On the other hand, there are texts which illustrate its function, like the one with the title "Officer of the Yugoslav People's Army declared that the Croatian Government should be slaughtered". Croatian TV broadcasted this information on April 30, 1991. The result was the "glass night" in Zadar. The assault was directed against the settlement Bili Brig in which a big number of Yugoslav People's Army officers were living. In different ways, among others also by using explosives, glass was broken on many buildings and business premises belonging to citizens of Serb nationality. In such an atmosphere the death of the police officer Franko Lisica resulted in yet another assault, in which some 30 shops and cafes owned by Serbs were destroyed, after which Zadar "resembled a battlefield". Offering excuse to "the audience and the persons mentioned in the news for broadcasting an unchecked information" the Croatian Information Agency claimed the "information was broadcast by mistake". Of course, the effect was already accomplished and nobody was held responsible for that.

It was Slobodna Dalmacija's refusal to keep silent, which caused the failure of its transformation. Even a three-day strike of the majority of the journalists and editors in March 1993 – with the slogan "For the Republic of Croatia and the free audience!", and with the support of a part of the international public – did not stop HDZ's robbery. And, even the leaders of the oppositional HSLHS claimed that SD and Danas should have been suffocated because they had been pro-Yugoslav and pro-communist. Vlado Gotovac, (whose speech to Yugoslav People's Army commanders in Zagreb arouse dilemmas whether it represented hate speech) said even that democracy is not measured by the fate of one newspaper. Apart from completely exposing Tudjman's regime as a totalitarian regime of a nationalistic nature, this act indicated also the looting background of this regime and revealed that among the journalist who fought for "our cause" together with the rare sincere "believers" in the national state there were mainly those who were seeking to make a career, conformists and various unfulfilled hangers-on. A part of journalists were not allowed to write, a part refused to write in such a newspaper which did no longer differ from other dailies, or the TV program, not wanting to be accomplices in the crime. Until the end of the 90-ies some hundred journalists quit from the newspaper.

A part of Slobodna Dalmacija's journalists afterwards established Feral Tribune. This paper, initially a fortnightly, courageously resisted fascisation of the society, paying a high price for this; part of its circulation was publicly set on fire. However, despite all the efforts, this paper just like the fortnightly Arkzin, or Novi list from Rijeka, or Bumerang from Osijek and few other media, together with nongovernmental organizations and few intellectuals, could not stop the nationalistic and chauvinist madness and revanchism based upon the production of enemies and its alleged fifth column, nor brake the wall built around the Liberation war like a mythology. In this context, all those who were removing the mythology around this war were declared to be enemies of its dignity and this of Croatia. This is why resistance defined in such a way meant risking life, particularly if you asked questions disliked by the regime, or even worse, disliked by the local holders of power. Those who had tried this in "state-building" media had above themselves politically correct editors and were forced to give up or leave. Some of the "independent" media established in the meantime could also not endure. So, the weekly Globus reached the bottom with texts on Mira Furlan, "Witches from Rio", camps in Herzegovina... "Here we do not deal with mere lack of good taste, but rather with hard falls, which in an already extremely nervous war situation have only contributed to a mass hysteria, and exposed individuals to physical dangers and public condemnation. I have in mind, first of all, the cases of Mira Furlan and the so-called witches from Rio, which are even today often mentioned as the very bottom of misuse. Unfortunately, in Croatia sensitivity against national, racial and regional stereotypes is not developed... In this context I must separate Tanja Torbarina's anti-Muslim stereotypes, which, I am convinced, were adding fire to the war conflict with the Muslims, which had been overcome with difficulties", wrote Ivo Banac in 1994.

### Keeping Silent

Keeping silent also made it impossible to create the entire picture of what had been going on in the state. In our own environments we individually did know about certain dark developments, but we missed the whole picture. The media kept silent on crimes committed by "our side", on dismissals, evictions, bullying and other types of pressure, mainly against the Serb population. There was silence in regard to new interpretations of history, according to which the Independent State of Croatia was the dear dream of the Croats, to the destruction of anti-fascist signs, to the review of ustasha units in Croatian towns; for all this Croatia had to pay a high price. There was silence, and we keep silent also today on the first victim of war, the Croatian police officer Goran Alavanja, because he was of Serb nationality. There was silence, and there is silence also today on the participation of Serbs in the defense of Croatia – from Dubrovnik to Osijek and Vukovar. There was silence also when the ustasha officers were becoming members of the Croatian Parliament and Croatian diplomats, who even publicly declared that they would be doing today exactly what they had been doing back in 1941. In some cases, silence had an even more destructive effect than writing. Because, one can sin even by not acting, and not only by publishing texts which today belong to the anthology of hate speech.

And if it were not for the media and journalists who did find the strength and courage to write about the truth, or to strive towards it, the public would nowadays not know about many of the editors' "omissions". These texts become documents of a hard time, and today they should also warn us on where we stand and where we are heading.



### Blessing

Namely, it does happen that statements like the one by Franjo Tudjman that he was happy that his wife was neither a Serb nor a Jew, or by Sime Djodan on short Serbs with pointed heads, or by Bosiljko Misetic that Croatian children should be taught from their childhood who are the enemies (by which he meant the Serbs), have contemporary followers, although neither by frequency nor by scope comparable to the 90-ies. Only occasionally there are comments related to statements of high-ranking priests who were saying that the indicted generals are in their hearts, but with not a word related to the victims.

In the state, which is proud of its Catholicism, the following message has been forgotten: do not do to others what you would not have them do to you. Not all of the members of the clergy stuck to this, skipping over some of the Gospel's chapters in their activities. We did not see the high representatives of the clergy stand for the small man in concrete cases related to robbed enterprises and criminal bankruptcy, or for the ordinary prisoners, as they did stand up supporting those suspected of war crimes or even those convicted because of them. Some of them, who were seen as spokesmen of the Catholic Church, for instance don Zivko Kustic, had even publicly stood against Croatia being successor of ZAVNOH's Croatia, which is written down in the Constitution. At the same time, the media were placing this silent Church upon the pedestal of the moral stronghold of Croats. The first man of the Catholic Church in Croatia has not yet visited Jasenovac, and we are still waiting for the reaction related to graffiti with the letter "U" and the cross in it. Apart from honorable exceptions, we did not exactly hear representatives of the Orthodox Church to properly condemn the self-declared Srpska Krajina. Likewise, the first person of the Islamic Community said in Bleiburg Field that this was the location at which the cream of the Muslim youth was killed. And the media, of course, did not pat the Orthodox Church, although they were more than benign in regard to the other two Churches. The lack of reaction on part of the religious communities to the most severe examples of disseminated hatred and crime, or only a mild and general criticism in this regard, had been more of a blessing to such behavior than opposition to the "moral authority".

Although part of the media had done the work of part of the state institutions, and even made some of them start functioning, it is hard to believe that this would have been successful if there were no parallel pressure by the international community. This is visible from the sequence of events. "Independent" media were writing about crimes in the 90-ies, too, but prosecution thereof started only after the year 2000. The same applies to the sphere of criminal, the fight against which started after strong pressures from abroad to deal with corruption and smuggling. Therefore it can be said that the lack of political pressure resulted also in the lack of pressure from the media to deprive the convicted generals (Mirko Norac and Tihomir Blaskic, with the former one living generally freely in an open-type prison, and the latter being welcomed from The Hague as if he were acquitted) of their ranks in accordance with law. Rather the contrary happened, the media were eager to report on threats which general Branimir Glavas made from the hospital. These and other similar examples can be found in practically all media. An overall subordination of the media to criteria of the showbiz, low education profiles of a big number of journalists (not only in regard to formal, school education) contributed to a constant presence of such examples. So, there is no polemic when the priest Kruno Peronja justifies district's recognition to Thompson because he had "sung against the white powder, and for love to God...", nor are there

analyzes of why the graduates from the Secondary Technical in Split sing "Jasenovac and Gradiska stara". This creates an illusion that there is much less hate speech (related to nationally confronted entities in the war) than before. Some even say that it is almost non-existent. Namely, "contacts" are declining in number because there is no war, and there are fewer Serbs, so that the number of such incidents is also reduced. At the same time, hate speech is more sophisticated and better camouflaged, and one of the reasons for the illusion is also the changed threshold of sensitivity, so the reactions are fewer than examples. In this respect, there is no essential change, particularly if we focus on incidents with origins in racism and xenophobia. For this, it is sufficient to look every week Feral Tribune's column "Greatest Shits".

#### Oblivion

Therefore, oblivion is scary; let us start only with those alive and active. So, a man who as Minister of the Interior had publicly, before investigation, declared the members of Dalmatian Action to be terrorists, is nowadays heading the National Security Council. The man who was heading the Agency which had stolen Slobodna Dalmacija from the journalists is now heading the HOO, and the former director of Croatian Radio-Television who distributed ethnic dismissals is now member of the MOO. The author of intelligence texts in Nedjeljna Dalmacija is President of the Volleyball Association. A Member of Parliament is pretending to be a "governor" and is the true persecutor of "witches". The actual mayor of Osijek is the President of HSP Anto Djapic, who once said to the Serbs in Vukovar that the actual government can pass hundreds of laws on forgiveness and reconstruction, but that HSP will once, whenever, come to power and that they will then get into big trouble. This man, who is attached to the intimist poetry of Marko Perkovic Thompson, was showing together with this singer of stone-age genes "the height of corn" at the founding rally of the party in Split in 1991. Public television is nowadays broadcasting Cavoglavac's songs, claiming to have cut out "all contentious parts from the concert" with recognizable iconography which even Leni Riefenstahl would had envied; the concert included songs about the "bad year 45" and warnings "not to turn left". Hence, along the same pattern as in the 90-ies. Similar is the attitude to such events in sport. Maybe the most impressive example is the one with the mentioning of the name of the football fans from Siroki Brijeg - "skripari", which is the name for ustashas who after World War II were hiding in caves. Even the leaders of SDP speak of ustashas as a problem of choice, which favors those who want to make the past a relative issue. The indicted generals remain to be treated as heroes, so do those against whom there are final indictments; for instance, Mirko Norac sent congratulations which were read at brigades' celebrations and the public channel broadcasted them. The climax is when the media impose the vagrant Zdravko Mamic as a criterion and standard of Croatism, and he is giving money from matches of the football club Dinamo for the defense of generals, whilst this club is getting donations from the city budget. This, in turn, means that the mayor of Zagreb Milan Bandic shares the same attitude, but nobody is commenting such behavior.

Oblivion wipes it all away. Hloverka Novak Srzic has a talk show and wants to be editor of the information program, through which she organized persecution against Roman Latkovic. "Watch-out!", the main show of TV Nova, hosted Bora "Corba" or organized exculpation of "super Kvisko" and its deification, but without reminding of articles which were spreading hatred of the lowest possible level. This is what makes possible the publishing of a text which present results of research conducted by some Serb pseudo-scientist under the title "It is a scandal that people from Imotski are Serbs". Hence, not the research is a scandal, or the methodology applied, but rather the conclusions. Just like it would probably be a "scandal" if people from Zemun were Croats. It is forgotten what the leading columnists of the leading weeklies and dailies were writing in the 90-ies. Former editors hold managerial posts. Josip Jovic and his clones, who had been publishing anthological examples of hate speech like for instance Andreja Rora's text on Jasenovac Panorama, are well positioned in editorial boards. The author of the "Journalists' Fifth Column" is also regularly performing his duties. It looks like we are having a silent consensus on noninterference. We no longer have Vinko Grubisic's Department for Media Planning, but the spirit is still alive. This is why it is possible that the public is spending days in discussing statements of the former leaders of Croatian TV Tomislav Marcinko and Milovan Sibl who claimed that some thirty collaborators of "SDB and KOS" were still working in Croatian Radio and Television, instead to say that these two and many of their followers do not deserve the least journalists' attention except if it is aimed at investigating their responsibility.

#### What is to be done?

If we look at things in this way it becomes clear that a part of the journalists is continuing to use hate speech, conscious of the reality in which politics is still in need of an "ethnically marked enemy". The demand for lustration of members of the League of Communists was not accepted in the 90-ies because a big (statistically self-sustainable) percentage of the new rulers had a "red" past. If we take a look at the problem of journalists' responsibility and possible sanctions for them, it is difficult not to make the same conclusion. Therefore, despite the fact that a number of journalists do deserve to face the court for what they had been doing, it is more important to establish the responsibility of the politicians. Why

would we grant exemption from proceedings to those who even today are manipulating the "holy issues". This does not mean postponing responsibility of the journalists. Responsibility should be established for all perpetrators, because if at least the most important ones are not going to be sentenced the entire people will be stigmatized. In the case of journalists (in view of the time elapsed and how serious things were done) the only question is regarding the level which it should reach. The Court of Honor's sentence, without defining license is not sufficient. It is a matter of maturing of a society's consciousness whether it is possible speak about some journalists primarily in their own environment – like in the case of the University in Freiburg which spoke about Martin Heidegger and expressed pain and shame for the victims of national socialism, whose coming to power the famous philosopher had welcomed. Primary responsibility for exposing hate speech and its promoters in the recent past, and also those of today, lies with the journalists and their professional association; they should constantly remind the public of what they had been doing and with what disastrous consequences. Anyway, as Jasmina Kuzmanovic said when writing about the "Furlan case", some of them "can be affected neither by shame nor embarrassment, nor by calling upon some ethical norms or family emotions. Nor can they be influenced by revoking professionalism". For them, there are institutions of the state of law and it is a pity that, at least in the most drastic examples, they had not reacted although, exactly in these cases it might not yet be too late. This would be of help also to the journalists' association to follow one of the messages of the "Sarajevo duty" adopted at the World Journalists Congress in 2000 in Sarajevo, in which the journalists undertake "not to bow to obstacles... until every human being will be able to live a life with meaning and fulfillment, a life worthy of human beings".

Split, September 2, 2007.