



From Divisions toward Coalition

Professional Associations of Journalists in BiH

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Journalism – a profession under threat

The Bosnian-Herzegovinian media follow the logic of ethno-political divisions and operate according to political affiliations with certain political options. Groups (constitutive or ethno-national) in which media and their editorial policies are embedded are important as a source of legitimacy for “their” public. As such, the media are not held accountable and cannot act in their prescribed role as “watchdogs” of democracy. Recent researches indicate a very poor socio-economic position of journalists in BiH. Journalists are constantly under political pressures to follow the interests of their owners while reporting for their media outlet. Research conducted by the NGO “Lara” in 2006 shows that the average salary of journalists in BiH was 350 EUR per month, while 22% of the respondents to the research declared that they had incomes of less than 250 EUR per month. Also, this research indicates that the amount of income depends on the type of media and the city where a journalist works. Therefore salaries were higher in big cities (Sarajevo, Banja Luka), while they were much smaller in Dobož and Bijeljina.¹ As it is concluded by the Balkan Media Barometer for 2011, journalists in BiH are “exploited and poorly paid, afraid of being sacked, and cannot be truly free and motivated to adhere to professional standards in their daily work”. Quite a number of media employees work for periods of more than five years without any contract, health insurance or employer’s contribution to pension or disability fund.² Results of research conducted by Mediacenter Sarajevo from 2008 indicate that the most prominent violations of labour rights of media employees are related to salaries (43%), working conditions (33%), and length of the working day (39%).³

Consequently, journalists feel insecure without proper protection, and since trade unions and associations are weak, there are no collective advocates of their rights. Just a small number of journalists are members of trade unions in BiH. The research, conducted by Sarajevo Mediacenter in 2008, shows that 32% of the respondents (the total number of respondents was 122) were enrolled in trade unions, whereas those journalists employed by private media houses were not union members⁴, while other sources indicate an even worse situation—that only around 15% of journalists are members of trade unions.⁵ Considering the fact that the media in BiH are not (politically) independent, and trade unions have been considered to be irrelevant and inefficient, it should be the role of associations of professional journalists to advocate for better professional standards in the media and to protect the basic rights of their journalists and, consequently, to secure the credibility of information published/broadcasted. Currently, due to limited data, only general information on professional journalist associations and their missions and activities in BiH are publicly available. These limited data show that not all of the journalist associations in BiH exist for the protection of the rights of journalists. There are six journalist associations in BiH—three in the Federation of BiH and three in Republika Srpska. These associations are the following: the Association “BH Journalists” [BH Novinari], the Association of Journalists of RS, the Association of Croat Journalists from BiH, the Association of BiH Journalists, the Association of Young Journalists of RS, and the Network of Women Journalists. One more association, which is not registered separately, is the Association of Reporters from the Court of BiH, and this association is part of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN).

Summary

Journalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is endangered. We are witnessing permanent violations of rights and freedoms of journalists, and a situation where journalists work in very bad conditions, without socio-economic protection, and are being poorly paid with an average salary of 350 EUR per month. Some research and records show that less than 30 % of journalists in BiH are members of trade unions, so more than two-thirds are unprotected. Professional standards in journalism and the rights of journalists in BiH are additionally affected by the fact that there is no unique journalist’s association or effective cooperation among existing associations. There are various models of cooperation that could be applied to BiH. The Serbian experience, where various associations of journalists established a common platform-media coalition—is useful and indicative. Based on the evaluation of policy alternatives—the status quo, various models of cooperation and radical change which implies establishment of one, state-based organization—this brief advocates for the incremental model of cooperation and will present its different forms.

¹ Milojević, M. „Radno-profesionalni i socijalni položaj novinara u BiH”, in: Blagovčanin, Srdan, *Bosna i Hercegovina 2007: Uloga i stanje medija*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung / Transparency International, 2007: 90 – 92.

² Tešanović, Nataša, ed. “Balkan Media Barometer: Bosnia and Herzegovina 2011”, Sarajevo: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012: 61

³ Hodžić, S. „Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Labor Relation and Media*, Moldova: International Policy Institute, 2008. 92 – 130.

⁴ Hodžić, 2008. Pg. 120-121.

⁵ Balkan media barometer, 2011: 63.

Country	Population	Number of Journalists	Average Salary	Number of Associations	Number of Trade Unions	Journalists in Trade Unions / Associations
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.8 mill.	2,000 – 2,500	350 EUR	6	4	17 – 32 % (trade unions)
Serbia	7.1 mill.	8,000 -10,000	200 – 500 EUR	3	2	70 %
Croatia	4.4 mill.	7,000	700 – 1.200 EUR	1	1	70 %

TABLE: Comparative insight into the number of journalists, professional associations, and trade unions in three targeted countries

Declaratively these associations in BiH advocate for professionalism of the media and rights of journalists; however, as it is obvious from everyday practice, they are under strong political pressures and consequently, they are divided. There is also no common platform or will for joint action and cooperation. As a result, the community of journalists is affected by these divisions, and each of them is forced to choose whether to belong to these exclusively defined associations or to stay out.

The imperative of cooperation

With an aim to protect professional standards and journalism generally, the rights of journalists and prevention of pressures on journalists in BiH, the current associations of journalists in BiH should merge their efforts and jointly act to advocate for a better situation. Since the current state of affairs where associations are divided without joint activities or initiatives, and while the formation of a unique state-based association is not a sustainable option, an incremental solution could be to establish a joint platform for cooperation between associations.

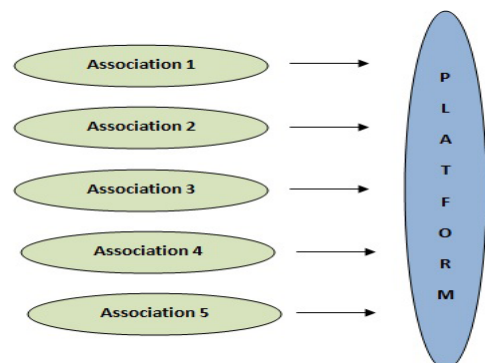
Various models of cooperation

Different types or models of cooperation proved to be efficient and functional in the case of In Serbia associations were divided along ideological or political lines (the Association of Journalists of Serbia, UNS, and the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia, NUNS), had disputes in front of the court (UNS and NUNS), have been led by a specific topics, goals, and missions (the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina), presenting the exact type of media (Association of Independent Broad-

casting Media, ANEM, or Local Press, local based media), they established a very strong platform of cooperation.

In this section, three types of cooperation will be presented, and possibilities for their implementation in BiH will be analysed. These sub-models are: platform-based cooperation or media coalition, project-based cooperation, and *ad hoc* cooperation.

- Cooperation based on common platform or media coalition – This model is similar to the one established in Serbia where five professional associations agreed on common goals, defined their cooperation as a platform-based (they signed a common code). This model implies the existence of a common platform / consensus (common principles and aims), joint code, and concrete goal (in the case of Serbia, this was to draft and adopt the Media Strategy). This type of cooperation is of a mid or long-term nature, since all parties signed a joint platform, which is a document that defines general principles of the profession of journalism and morally binding steps in preserving and protecting these principles. This sub-model implies that associations with various backgrounds, interests (even ethnic or political ones), aims, organizational capacities, rally together to establish a common platform of cooperation that frames their joint efforts in order to reach a certain goal. Joint activities could be various: joint action and pressure towards the state, joint statements on various occasions, joint press conferences, or joint field activities of various types (projects, research, etc.).

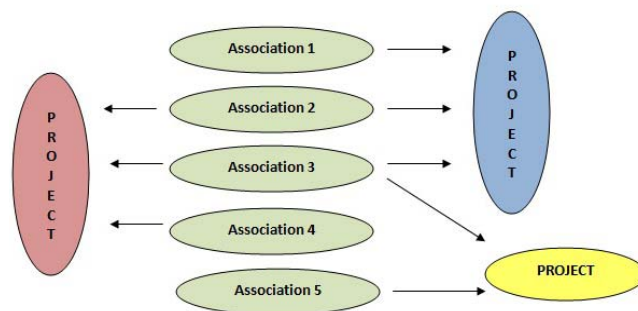


GRAPH 1: Model of media coalition

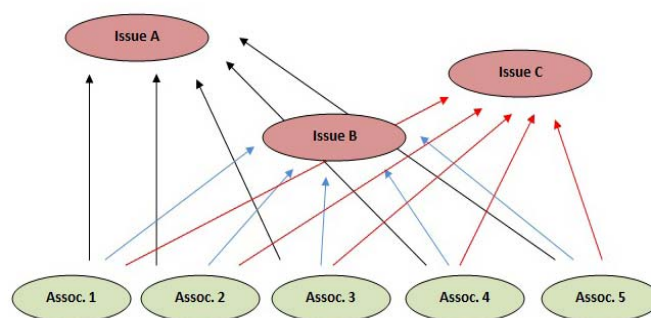


- Cooperation based on joint projects – In this model, various associations are linked together throughout various projects that are jointly implemented. They could have, but not necessarily, a joint platform or statements of cooperation (for example, sometimes donors demand it). For that reason, this kind of cooperation is pretty weak in the terms of sustainability, solidarity and durability, and it is rather of a short or mid-term nature. It could be transformed into a coalition or some other form of binding cooperation rather than a pure project partnership. For example, some associations/organizations sign a kind of partnership statement that binds both sides to apply for certain projects only in partnership with each other. The success and durability of this kind of cooperation would be based mainly on the association's capacity (human, technical, financial, etc.) to manage, lead and implement projects. As a result of unequal development, some associations would have a better position and much more capacity to foster this kind of cooperation (like Association 3 from the Graph 2), while some will not benefit from this cooperation (Associations 1 and 4 from the Graph 2). Also, success would depend on their openness and will to establish project-based partnerships with various associations. Potential animosities among their leaderships could be an especially big obstacle.

common reasons for joint activity on an ad hoc basis would be serious violations of the rights of journalists, pressures and attacks on journalists, unsuccessful privatization of media and the consequences of journalists being employed there, etc. Besides joint statements, associations could organize joint press conferences, protests, etc.



GRAPH 2: Project-based cooperation



GRAPH 3: Model of Ad Hoc cooperation

Recommendations

- Ad hoc cooperation - This type of cooperation is of a short-term and occasional nature. Associations are not bound by any joint platform, document or strategy for cooperation, but rather they act together when it comes to big violations of journalists' rights or some incidental situation in which journalists are endangered. This issue-driven cooperation means that associations should react jointly in these situations by issuing joint statements, protesting together, using other means to warn government actors to take active measures in protecting the rights of journalists. The most

Taking into account that the rights of journalists are endangered in BiH on a permanent basis, and that trade unions have been considered as irrelevant and inefficient, it should be the role of associations of professional journalists to advocate for better professional standards in media and to protect the basic rights of their journalists and, consequently, secure the credibility of information published/broadcasted.

On a declarative level, **in the sense of principles and missions** promoted by associations of journalists in BiH, associations are quite similar and share the same principles. This could be a good basis for establishing cooperation. Additionally, all significant associations are mem-



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bers of the International Federation of Journalists, sharing its aims and principles which would be another strong reason to foster cooperation. In that regard, **advocating the principles and standards of professional journalism, and the protection of the rights of journalists** should be the ultimate goal of these joint activities. This goal would overcome the current state of division and the narrow focus of certain associations.

Joint activities, based either on an ad hoc basis or on some platform-based cooperation, would **increase the credibility** of each of these associations among journalists and among other actors from the society of BiH (governments, owners, donors, international community). Also, it would **attract more journalists to become members**, and consequently **increase the legitimacy** of these associations to advocate on behalf of the journalist community in BiH.

In a practical sense, associations **should jointly advocate for those groups or rights that are the most vulnerable or endangered** and that are related to working conditions, the quality of contracts and protection that derives from the contracts, social contributions, and pressures from the side of owners, editors, politicians and various businessmen.

In order to be accurate and timely in communicating with various external publics, each association should have an **arranged, up-to-date, visually attractive web page**. This is considered today as the most important tool of presentation and communication.

When we discuss the possible target groups, these associations primarily act as a service to their membership, but they also address other potential publics. Accordingly, their activities could be classified in the following way:

- **Own members:** Professional associations should act as a service to their members. They should provide services such as allowances for travel, legal aid, solidarity and the like.
- **Journalist community:** In relation to this target group, associations need to promote professional standards. They have to establish criteria for membership, a code of conduct, a court of honour to ensure

compliance with code standards, hearings in the case of code violations, as well as awards for best papers.

- **Public, state and business sector:** These groups need to protect the interests of the profession: to promote the smooth operation of journalism, freedom of speech, access of information, to protect labour rights, to propose legislative solutions, etc.

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A "Policy Development Fellowship Program" has been launched by the Open Society Fund BiH in early 2004 with the aim to improve BiH policy research and dialogue and to contribute to the development of a sound policy-making culture based on informative and empirically grounded policy options. The program provides an opportunity for selected fellows to collaborate with the Open Society Fund in conducting policy research and writing a policy study with the support of mentors and trainers during the whole process. Eight one fellowships have been granted since the starting of the Program. All policy studies are available at www.soros.org.ba