

THE ROLE OF JOURNALISM IN THE PREVENTION OF CONFLICTS AND IN THE SUSTENTION OF MULTIETHNIC, MULTICULTURAL AND MULTIRELIGIOUS SOCIETY - (ELEMENTS OF A STRONG CIVIL SOCIETY AND HEALTHY PUBLIC LIFE)¹

I believe it is not necessary to emphasise the importance of the role of the media in the prevention of conflicts, or, to what extent the media incited conflicts and served as an instrument of nationalistic politics against minorities on the territory of former Yugoslavia. What journalists can do in order to enable the promotion of peace among nations as well as the prevention of conflicts, could be most competently discussed by those who have personally experienced the fatal consequences of the transformation of an honourable profession into a servile lackey of the war master and an exponent of the most ruthless propaganda imbued with unabashed chauvinism, xenophobia and intolerance.

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The media landscape has been poisoned by the language of hatred to such an extent that its decontamination has not yet been completed, nor, in a way, has it truly begun.

We face the need to restore the dignity of, to some extent, a compromised profession. We should go back to the key principles of free journalism, which enable it to be an indispensable factor in the development of democracy in society, to be a corrective to government and to **incorruptibly** disclose social evils. Furthermore, free journalism should be the important means of the fight against racism and xenophobia, prejudices and preconceptions, that is, it should be able to recognise the rights and to defend the dignity of the members of minorities.

The warmongering journalism in Croatia is one of the main motives as a consequence of which Croatian journalists have an appointment with truth. Unfortunately, the process of **detudmanisation** of Croatia has not been going on at a speed which could overcome the longing of many, who wish that all squalor in reporting and commentating in the past decade be swept under the **virtual** carpet created by **Tudman's** death, the process of disintegration of the Croatian Democratic Union and the expected victory of the opposition in last year's parliamentary elections.

Admittedly, there is almost no more talk about **Tudman**, yet he was the chief originator of the climate of dissemination of hatred and intolerance in Croatia, and was considered the leading factor in articulating the lack of freedom in the media. Sometimes it seems to us as if he had not been there at all. But that is a delusion. The

consequences of the politics and spiritual climate created by that Croatian master of war are so grave and deep-rooted in the psyche of an average citizen of the republic of Croatia that it is impossible to evaluate them in the right way.

Although uncritically supporting, nationalistic and even chauvinistic journalism is for many a problem of the past, its existence in our consciousness is being renewed, in the context of the discussion about **revanchism**, primarily by those who have spread the language of hatred and intolerance, and who have destroyed the dignity of the journalistic profession. Now they scream that there are attempts to remove them from the media scene.

There are three things I would like to emphasise when it comes to the role of Croatian journalists in inciting the war machinery and initiating the politics of the destruction of other nations and states.

1. There was a culture of lies

Times of great truths, such as the ones emerged from the process of the disintegration of Socialist Yugoslavia, are usually deeply imbued with an omnipresent culture of lies. This culture of lies, it seems, has long since been accepted, generated and consolidated by small nations on the Balkans.

As an example, twenty years ago, nations in former Yugoslavia genuinely cried at Tito's funeral. Today, these same nations claim in

unison that they had lived under "the repressive heel of the communist dictator".

A lie, just as death, had become a natural state, a norm of behaviour, and liars are normal citizens. Thus, **Dobrica** Cosic, a Serbian writer and unsuccessful president of Yugoslavia, deserves some acknowledgement, if any, for his authorial **rebuttal**: " A lie is an aspect of our patriotism and confirmation of our inherent intelligence."

The culture of lies is most easily established if there is an adversary that lies even more, or speaks a more horrible and diabolical language. Only the dead do not lie, however, within the context of the culture of lies, they have no credibility. The lie gradually developed from a norm of political and media behaviour, which legalised the lie, into a strategy of war, and as a war strategy it, rapidly established itself as morally acceptable.

2. The culture of life should be extolled against the culture of lies

The culture of lies should be contrasted with the culture of truth and life. Truth here does not imply mere exactness or consent. It is not something that could be fabricated or that could be used for manipulation. Where illogical schemes of action do not include lived reality, the need for argumentation and foundation appears.

A journalist must never leave truth an open question. He stands under pressure to face it. **In** this way, journalism is not a mere gathering of

information, but a critical enquiry about reality. A test of every truth, also a journalistic truth, lies, as Heidegger claimed, "only in faithfulness towards oneself. A journalist serves truth by being free and by respecting life and truth of each and every being.

We must have realised that journalism represents crime if it can no longer distinguish an organised lie. Strangely, nevertheless, it has been generally considered that this crime needs not be punished. On the other hand, I believe that a certain international court for criminals in journalism should exist, and that those, who, by using lies, enabled and incited war crimes and criminals should be branded as such.

I think it is a real pity that the intention of Richard Goldston, the prosecutor of the International Tribunal in The Hague, who hoped for the prosecution of those, who (I quote) "misused the media in a criminal way", did not come into existence. It is easy to identify the protagonists of media crimes, since their traces are more difficult to destroy.

The man of today inhabits a civilisation of death. It appears that in the past century approximately 175 million people died a violent death. We are surrounded by so much evil and so many lies that we simply have to say and believe this is an evil time for goodness. Today, namely, it becomes clearer and more evident that moral action is not solely needed, but that it is, altogether, the basis of human life.

"Living a life humanely - and this is a central notion of every moral — demands from us to reach a meaningful optimum of development of our own emotional, social, spiritual and cultural life, which has, and must have, social consequences."

3. There are no songs of praise of hatred

Had there been no genetic shame concerning the feeling of hate, and I claim there is, except in psychopathic personalities, I suppose its power would have been celebrated in verse at least as much as love. If no one normal person praises and extols hate, how is it possible to theoretically criticise such an unexplained passion? For anything defined as "the language of hatred", its author will produce a refutation in the form of patriotic and nation-building principles, proving that those who dare identify something like that in his work, are actually the ones who hate those same principles.

We could hardly go forward without self-control and tolerance. But tolerance does not imply putting up with something, withdrawing from actions one finds acceptable, nor refusal to intervene because one is not familiar with a problem or due to sheer indifference.

Strictly morally speaking, tolerance leads us to two key issues: the necessity of self-control and the relation between another person and autonomy.

Tolerance cannot cure hatred or replace love and solidarity, nor can it make society happy, free or affluent. It simply makes society what it is. Everything else follows. There is no point in tolerance unless its subject has power and knowledge.

In Croatia today we are partly taking a rest from those who spread the language of hatred, incited war and told us that everyone, who is not prepared to lie for their homeland, is an enemy and a traitor. Had there

not been some fifty, maybe less, independent journalists who were not intimidated and who never abandoned a professional relation towards their work, the following journalistic generation would have been an irretrievable failure.

Therefore, the following question is posed: How could the media, especially electronic media, be modified, in order to become a more significant protagonist that would help create more tolerant, peaceful and healthier societies?

Journalists are faced with a responsibility for settling scores with inner weaknesses which compromise journalistic standards as well as for the application of the principles of diversity and pluralism on all levels. Notably:

The Journalists and their professional associations would have to require such a politics of recruitment in media, which would encourage journalists from minority communities to engage in journalism;

Professional training of journalists has to focus on the questions of discrimination and intolerance in society. The production staff and journalists who gather information often lack a sufficient awareness of or knowledge about the society in which they serve;

Journalists and media organisations have to broaden the way in which they cover a certain community, and they have to employ authorised and representative sources of information from minority communities or other ethnic communities when it comes to relevant topics in the news;

Journalistic associations should work harder to organise conferences, seminars, and workshops in order to enable journalists to exchange

information and improve the level of consciousness within their profession;

International federations of journalists and journalistic associations from Central Europe, the South East, the Balkans and Mediterranean areas should work more systematically to ensure and develop **journalists'** awareness of national and international ethical codes;

Apart from that, they should finally establish a programme for monitoring and reporting on the actions of the media in areas of intolerance; and also they would have to get involved in a dialogue with governments and other professional organisations, with the aim of defending journalistic independence (in Croatia there is no adequate legal framework for the journalistic profession);

And now a few more sentences about the important elements of a strong civil society and a healthy public **life**...

Publics and public relationships are created through the common work of public action. Public action is not the same as the action of special interest groups; it is comprehensive and inclusive rather than categorical. And it is not the same as governmental or institutional action, which is uniform, linear, and usually coordinated by some administrative agency.

Being successful in the long run requires an active public, one involved in an ongoing process of making judgments about whether the results a community is getting from its efforts are consistent with what is truly valuable to its citizens. That is how a community develops the capacity for continuous adaptation and ongoing improvement. We in

former Yugoslavia need a more public kind of accountability, with citizens directly involved in assembling and weighing the evidence of accomplishment, evidence that include their own experiences. In this case the public would evaluate itself rather than merely receive reports of what institutions and agencies had done.

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