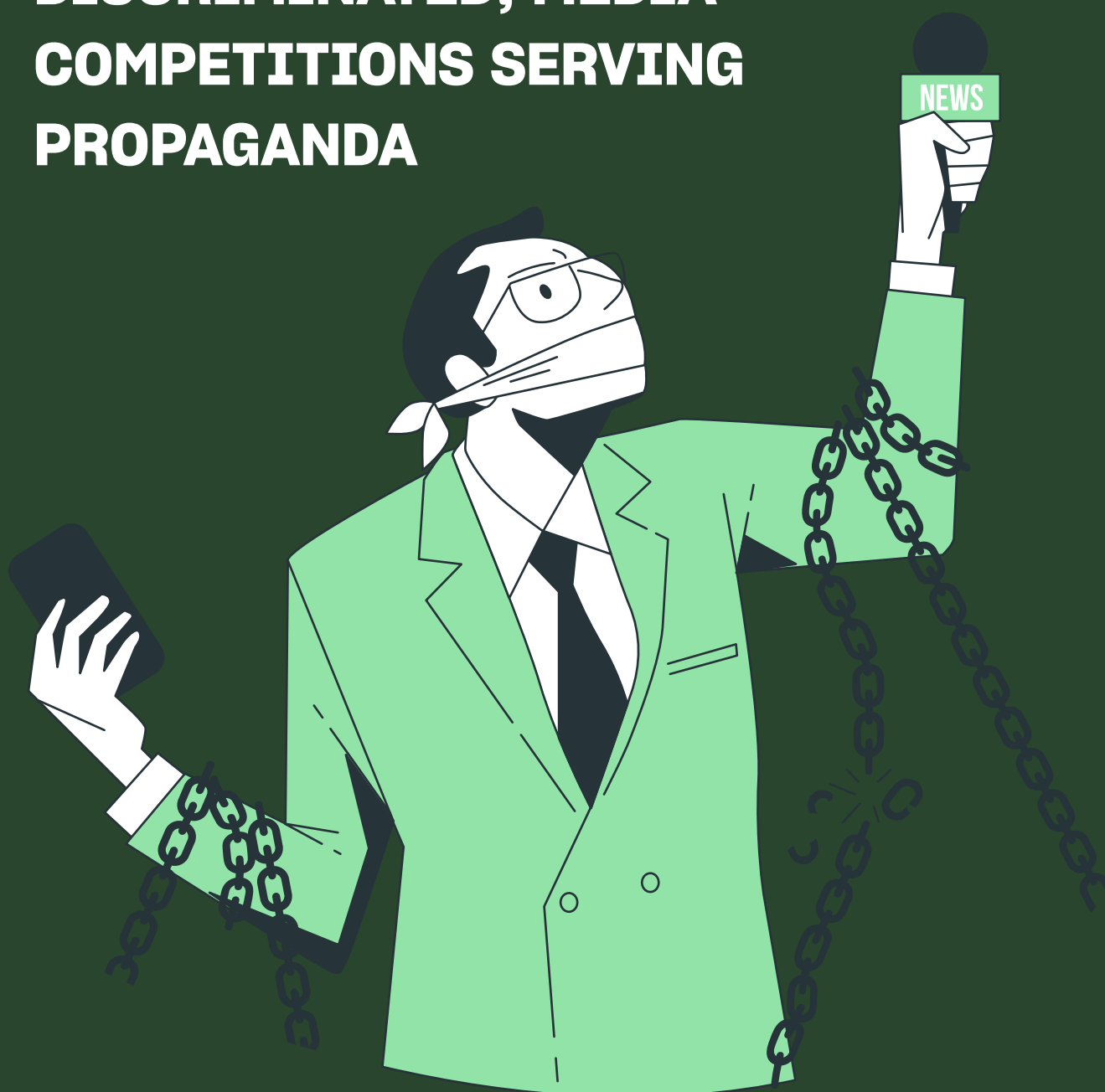




Kingdom of the Netherlands



LOCAL JOURNALISTS DISCRIMINATED, MEDIA COMPETITIONS SERVING PROPAGANDA



ANALYSIS OF MEDIA FINANCING IN MULTIETHNIC
COMMUNITIES



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INTRODUCTION

“The political and media landscapes remained polarized and continued to be dominated by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and the incumbent President,” it is stated in the European Commission’s 2022 Report¹ on Serbia, which also claims that no progress was made regarding freedom of expression. Furthermore, the report states that on several occasions the prosecutor’s office and the police were quick to react in matters related to violence and threats, but that threats and violence against journalists remain a concern and that the overall environment for the exercise of freedom of expression without hindrance still needs to be further strengthened in practice. It is added that the implementation of the media strategy experienced increasing delays, affecting even the most important measures such as amending the Law on Public Information and Media and the Electronic Media law.

In the 2022 Press Freedom Index report compiled by Reporters Without Borders², Serbia is ranked somewhat better in comparison with the previous year, i.e. it has improved its position by 14 places and is now ranked as 79th, but it is still the worst ranking of all former Yugoslav republics, classified as ‘problematic’.

In its annual report³, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights states that media freedom is still one of the most endangered rights in Serbia and that the media situation has continued to deteriorate. The number of assaults and the pressure on journalists have continued to rise, the rhetoric of authorities regarding the media that provide objective reports has become increasingly negative, pro-government media continue to be heavily financed despite that fact that the highest number of complaints and charges regarding breaching the professional code of conduct have been filed against those very same media. The report also states that hate speech has pervaded communication in the public sphere, rampant not only in tabloids, but also among those dictating the public narrative, government and parliamentary officials and that the state continued to co-fund media content of outlets infamous for their many violations of ethical and professional codes, as well as the law.

Even though the general aim of the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025⁴ (Media Strategy) and the accompanying Action plan⁵ is said to be a public information system improved through a harmonized legal framework, which guarantees freedom of expression, media freedom, safety of journalists, media pluralism, developed media market, empowered journalists’ profession, educated public and institutions capable of implementing the legislation, two years after this document was adopted, no actual progress has been achieved in any segment. The results of

1 file:///C:/Users/PC/Documents/NDNV%20projekti/diskriminacija%20novinara/Serbia_Report_2022_SR.pdf. Accessed on December 2, 2022

2 <https://www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/svetski-indeks-medijskih-sloboda-srbija-napredovala-do-79-mesta-ali-i-dalje-udrustvu-problematicnih-drzava/> Accessed on December 2, 2022

3 Pokuševski, Dušan. (2021). Human Rights in Serbia 2021, Belgrade: the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights <http://www.bgcenter.org.rs/bgcenter/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Ljudska-prava-u-Srbiji-2021.pdf> Accessed on 15.11.2022.

4 Strategija razvoja sistema javnog informisanja u Republici Srbiji za period 2020-2025. Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 11/20. Downloaded on January 12, 2021 from <https://www.kultura.gov.rs/tekst/sr/4993/strategija-razvoja-sistema-javnog-informisanja-urepublici-srbiji-za-period-od2020-do-2025.php>

5 Action plan for implementing the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025, for the 2020-2022. Downloaded on January 12, 2021 from <https://www.kultura.gov.rs/tekst/sr/5745/akcioni-plan-za-sprovodenjestrategije-razvoja-sistemajavnog-informisanja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-2020-2025-godina.php>.

an analysis of the current state of public information revealed an unfavorable socio-economic and professional position of journalists, as well as endangered safety of journalists and those employed in the media industry, which prompted the first measure of the aforementioned Media Strategy, defined as the “improvement and safety, socio-economic and professional conditions for the work of journalists and those employed in the media industry”. However, consequent analyses have shown that no progress has been made.

The research conducted over the past ten-odd years in the Republic of Serbia (Mihajlović 2011; the Journalists’ Association of Serbia (UNS), 2014; Mihailović 2015; Vukasović 2016; Matić 2018) all reveal a very bad socio-economic position of those employed in the media industry.

In comparison with the aforementioned claims, a research⁶ conducted within the scope of the project “Research and analysis of the perception of the socio-economic position of journalists and media practitioners in Vojvodina” by the Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) during 2020/2021 among journalists and media practitioners in Vojvodina showed that low salaries were not the main problem of media professionals. A subsequent analysis established that political pressures and lack of media autonomy, as well as sensationalism, tabloidization, breach of ethical standards and even the low level of media literacy among citizens were the problems that preoccupied this professional community more.

The research revealed that the professional status of journalists and media practitioners in Vojvodina reporting in the languages of ethnic minorities was further affected significantly by the national councils, which control the sector of information to a great extent. Namely, due to frequent misunderstandings between the outlets and publishers established by the national councils, those journalists are under a lot of professional pressure. The findings indicate that the journalists from the media outlets reporting in the languages of ethnic minorities believe they are in a worse financial situation than their colleagues reporting in Serbian, which is confirmed by the data that the journalists reporting in Serbia on average make between RSD 51,000 and 60,000, while those reporting in the languages of ethnic minorities typically make between RSD 41,000 and 50,000. However, journalists and media practitioners reporting in the languages of ethnic minorities claim that their difficult professional position is a graver issue than their economic status. They see a potential solution in adopting internal codes, which would regulate the issue of autonomy in conducting business and respect of the professional code of ethics.

When it comes to the professional position of women in journalism, the analysis shows that women journalists believe women professionals are more frequently exposed to insults, misogyny and hate speech, both in the virtual and real environment. They ascribe this fact to the still present remnants of the patriarchal society. Another worrying result of the survey is related to the issues of gender inequality, sexual harassment and safety, because those topics are not given enough attention by media organizations, as well as men and women journalists.

Bearing in mind these findings, which clearly indicate a constant breach of media freedoms, the Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina has initiated a project which

6 Action plan for implementing the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025, for the 2020-2022. Downloaded on January 12, 2021 from <https://www.kultura.gov.rs/tekst/sr/5745/akcioni-plan-za-sprovodenjestrategije-razvoja-sistemajavnog-informisanja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-2020-2025-godina.php>

analyses the factors impacting the professional work of media practitioners in multiethnic environments. The rationale behind the *Analysis of the current situation in discrimination against journalists, with focus on multiple, compound and intersectional discrimination, and the safeguarding freedom of expression in a local context* project is to investigate whether and to what extent are men and women journalists discriminated against in local communities and whether it would be possible to establish a correlation between political pressures and obedience of professional and ethical standards in media reporting. The focus of the research is on analyzing the (lack of) responsiveness of institutions, access to information, project co-financing, threats and violence, particularly regarding media practitioners from ethnic minority communities and those living in and reporting from multiethnic communities.

The research was conducted by analyzing the legal framework and results of the competition for financing provision of information in local communities, as well as by conducting in-depth interviews with nine men and women journalists, editors-in-chief, directors or owners of media outlets from various multiethnic communities in Vojvodina: Subotica, Sombor, Senta, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Maglić (Bački Petrovac) and Ruski Krstur. The interviewees all work at outlets that are different in terms of their type of ownership (civil society media, public broadcasting services, commercial and media founded by nation councils of national minorities) and they report in different languages: Slovakian, Hungarian, Ruthenian, Roma and Serbian (*Pančevo.city*, *Magločistač*, *Sombor.info*, *Storyteller*, *Ruske slovo*, *News and publishing company Hrvatska riječ*, *Radio-television of Vojvodina* (program in Roma and Hungarian), *Autonomija* (in Hungarian), *Családi Kör* (Family Circle) and *Szabad Magyar Szó* (Free Hungarian Word).

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

2.1. Criminal and legal protection of journalists in the Republic of Serbia

The criminal and legal protection of journalists in the Republic of Serbia is governed by the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code. Apart from these two laws, there are other protection mechanisms, established primarily as a result of the work of the permanent working group in charge of journalists' safety, applicable to journalists during a criminal procedure.

The Criminal Code gives a rather wide definition of a journalist and provides special protection to those performing tasks of public interest in the field of providing public information. In other words, apart from journalists, people who enjoy the kind of protection given to journalists include all those involved in creating news content, such as cameramen, editors... It should be noted that special criminal and legal protection is not provided to journalists in every situation, but only when the criminal offence has been committed against the journalist because of the work performed by the journalist in question.

The Criminal Code itself provides special protection to people performing tasks of public interest in the field of providing public information when it comes to the following three criminal offenses:

- A special type of criminal offense characterized as Aggravated murder (Art. 114, par. 1, item 8 of the Criminal Code), if it causes death of person who performs duty in public interest related to discharge of their duty;
- A special type of criminal offense characterized as Serious bodily harm (Art. 121, item 6 of the Criminal Code), inflicted on a person who performs duty in public interest and,
- A special type of criminal offense characterized as Endangerment of safety (Art. 138, item 3 of the Criminal Code), against a person important to public information related to discharge of their duty.
- Apart from these three criminal offenses, the sub-group in charge of analyzing the Criminal Code has identified 35 other criminal offenses that could be committed against journalists' safety.

The Criminal Procedure Code regulates how criminal charges are pressed on suspicion of criminal offense, how the relevant bodies should act in a criminal procedure and the position of the plaintiff in a criminal procedure. The Criminal Procedure Code itself does not contain any provisions related exclusively to journalists.

However, the Agreement on cooperation and measures to raise the level of safety of journalists and various acts of the Ministry of Interior and the State Public Prosecutor's Office, adopted with an aim to raise safety of journalists provide guarantees to journalists and other

media practitioners related to a number of process rights, primarily related to facilitating criminal offense reporting and prompt actions of the police and prosecutor's office when it comes to criminal offences against journalists.

The aforementioned agreement stipulates that each signatory association and relevant prosecutor's offices and police should establish contact points, available to journalists 24/7 for the purpose of reporting criminal offences against journalists related to discharge of their duty. In case of a criminal offence, a journalist can call the contact point from their association and inform them that they believe a criminal offense has been committed. The contact point from the journalists' association then calls the contact points in the police and public prosecutor's office and reports the criminal offense. This makes it easier for the journalists the criminal offense has been committed against to report the criminal offence, because they report it to a person they trust from their own association, while, on the other hand, the whole reporting procedure is much faster, because the contact points at the police and prosecutor's office are available 24/7, while the complaint itself is deprived of any legal form.

Furthermore, in order to provide more efficient criminal and legal protection of people performing tasks of public interest in the field of public information (hereinafter: journalists), the State Public Prosecutor's Office has passed the [General mandatory instruction O 10/20 on 24th December, 2020](#). This instruction basically introduces new obligations for public prosecutors, but some of those obligations actually provide additional rights to aggrieved journalists. This instruction is mandatory for all public prosecutor's offices in the Republic of Serbia. According to it, the public prosecutor is obliged to open a case and assign it to a case manager within 24 hours from receiving a criminal complaint or information about the committed criminal offense.

In the next 48 hours, the case manager is obliged to contact the aggrieved journalist and invite them to the relevant public prosecutor's office to provide more information about the case in question, so that other legal steps could be taken.

Each decision of the public prosecutor or court related to the case should be communicated to the public prosecutor in the local prosecutor's office and the contact point at the senior prosecutor's office.

Deputy public prosecutors that have been appointed as contact points are available to contact points at journalists' and media associations 24/7 and they are in constant coordination with the contact points at the police.

Apart from reaching the contact points at journalists' and media association, journalists can also report criminal offenses through the "Sigurna linija" (*Safe line*) call-center on 0800 100 115. This is a toll-free number that a journalist or media practitioner can call to report any situation in which they feel threatened or endangered because of performing their professional duty. By calling this number, a journalist can receive clearer instructions on the legal treatment of the incident and procedures that need to be initiated so that relevant institutions, the police and prosecutor's office would receive a complaint related to endangered safety, if we are talking about cases that require action within the scope of official duty. The journalist can also receive information about the contact points at the police and prosecutor's office in charge of the region where the aggrieved journalist works or where the offense has been committed.

2.2. Civil society media

Civil society media were legally recognized in 2014, when the Electronic Media law was adopted. However, it should be emphasized that this law uses another term for civil society media – civil society providers of media service. In relevant international documents adopted by the European Parliament and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe this type of media is referred to as community media.

The regulatory framework for civil society media includes national legal acts and ratified international legal acts. Article 16, item 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia stipulates that generally accepted rules of international law and ratified international treaties shall be an integral part of the legal system in the Republic of Serbia and applied directly.

One of the most important international documents related to civil society media is the Resolution on Community Media of the European Parliament, adopted on 25th September, 2008.

The resolution recognizes community media as an efficient tool for strengthening cultural and language diversity, social inclusion and local identity. It recognizes the importance of community media in cherishing pluralism, tolerance and intercultural dialogue. According to the resolution, community media should help strengthen the identity of certain interest groups, but also enable the members of those groups to connect with other social groups. Community media should contribute to intercultural dialogue by educating the public on the fight against negative stereotypes and ideas presented by mass media regarding social communities on the verge of disappearance, such as migrants, the Roma population, ethnic or religious minorities. Community media should also help the members of civil societies in unfavorable positions to become active participants in important public discussions. These media contribute to greater media literacy among citizens by including them in creating and distributing media content. In cases when public broadcasting services and commercial media are not interested in local topics, community media become the only source of local news and the only voice of local communities. The resolution recognizes financial sustainability as one of the main preconditions for this type of service and it points out that without adequate financial funds there cannot be quality community media and that the existing sources of funding of community media are rather depleted and that additional funds need to be provided to these media. Community media need to be independent from any political influence.

The resolution recommends to all countries to recognize community media in their respective legal systems as a separate type of media, different from public broadcasting services and commercial media.

The Council of Europe has also recognized the importance of community media. In 2009, the Committee of Ministers adopted the Declaration on the Role of Community Media in Promotion of Social Cohesion and Intercultural Dialogue. Due to their proximity to the general public, community media reflect various social needs and perform functions that commercial media and public broadcasting services cannot fully serve. Community media contribute to public debates, political pluralism and awareness and existence of different opinions. They make it possible for various social groups, such as cultural, language, ethnic, religious and other minorities to receive and transmit information. When it comes to language minorities, it

is particularly emphasized that community media in minority languages can efficiently reach minority groups.

It is also recognized that community media contribute to developing media literacy by including citizens directly in creating and distributing media content.

Due to the importance of community media to society, the declaration recommends that member states explore an option to allocate funds on national, regional and local level to direct or indirect support to these media, bearing in mind the competition they have.

The recommendation CM/Rec (2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states regarding media pluralism and transparency of media ownership points out that independent and sustainable public broadcasting services and non-profit community media can serve as a counterbalance to the increased concentration of media. Public broadcasting services are particularly suitable to meet the demand for information and interests of all segments of the community and community media are not different in that respect. Countries need to stimulate and support establishing and functioning of minority, regional, local and non-profit media and provide financial mechanisms to stimulate their development. Such independent media give voice to communities and individuals when it comes to topics relevant to their needs and interests and are, thus, vital for public discussions on issues that might not been represented in *mainstream* media, as well as for facilitating inclusive and participatory processes of a wider communities, on both regional and local levels.

When it comes to national legislation, the Law on Public Information and Media, as the umbrella law on media, does not recognize community media as a separate type of media and it does not even mention them.

On the other hand, community media are defined in the Electronic Media law. This law, in Article 44, recognizes community media, along with public broadcasting services and commercial media, as the third type of providers of media services, thus classifying them in a separate category, which is somewhere between public broadcasting services and commercial media. Furthermore, the law envisages that providers of media services, including community media, can provide media service on the whole territory of Serbia or on one of its parts.

Community media are dealt with in Chapter IV of the Electronic Media law, under the section Audio-visual media services of civil society, where Article 72 stipulates that the purpose of providing media services by community media is to meet specific interests of certain social groups (ethnic minorities, the youth, the elderly, disabled people, etc.) and citizens' organization, rather than to gain profit.

This definition of the purpose of providing media services of the civil society is in accordance with international documents, but it is not comprehensive. In accordance with the Declaration of the Council of Europe on the Role of Community Media in Promotion of Social Cohesion and Intercultural Dialogue, contribution to social cohesion and intercultural dialogue is the purpose of these media, so the purpose of providing media services by the civil society should be extended to include the promotion of social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

When it comes to providing media services by civil society, an important segment is its non-for-profit character. Consequently, the publishers of community media cannot be focused on gaining profit, which has a direct impact on what type of legal entities can be providers of media services from civil society.

Since enterprises and entrepreneurs are focused on gaining profit, they cannot be founders of community media. The law lists associations, trusts, foundations, church and religious organizations as possible non-for-profit broadcasters. Furthermore, the law stipulates that the media content provided by community media needs to be in accordance with the field of operation of the broadcaster. Namely, the articles of association of the association, trust or foundation define the field in which the organization will try to achieve its aims and the aims because of which it was established. Since community media need to reflect the interests of social groups gathered in such organizations for the purpose of achieving their goals through joint work, the community media founded by those organizations should adapt their media content to the aims of the organization.

The Electronic Media law stipulates that media service can be provided locally or regionally. The provisions of this law referring to program obligations of public broadcasters shall apply to non-for-profit broadcasters. Pursuant to the Law on public broadcasting, the public interest that a public broadcaster serves through its program are as follows:

truthful, timely, complete, impartial, and professional provision of information for the citizens and facilitation of freely formed expressions of opinions of listeners and viewers on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, autonomous province and local self-government;

1. respect for and representation of basic human rights and freedoms, democratic values and institutions, and advancing the public dialogue culture;
2. respect for privacy, dignity, reputation, honor, and other basic human rights;
3. respect and promotion of pluralism in political, religious, and other ideas and facilitation of the public's familiarity with those ideas, without serving the interests of individual political parties or religious communities, or any other individual political, economic, religious or similar positions or interests;
4. fulfillment of the informational needs of all sections of the population without any discrimination, particularly taking into consideration specific social groups such as children, young and elderly people, minorities and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, socially and medically disadvantaged, etc.;
5. fulfillment of the citizen's needs for programming that facilitates preserving and expressing the cultural identity both of the Serbian people and national minorities and ethnic groups, showing consideration for the need of national minorities and ethnic groups to have access to certain programming in their own language and alphabet;
6. impartial coverage of political, historical, economic, social, medical, cultural, educational, scientific, environmental, and other issues, enabling equal encounters of different views;

7. free and equal representation of political parties, coalitions, and candidates that have verified electoral registers for the republic, provincial, or local elections during campaigning;
8. affirmation of national cultural values of the Serbian people, national minorities and ethnic communities that live in the Republic of Serbia, as well as of meeting and intertwining of their cultures;
9. development of the media literacy of the population;
10. production of domestic documentary and feature programming;
11. timely provision of information about current events in the world and about scientific, cultural, and other civilizational achievements;
12. advancement of general education, medical education, and education in relation to environment protection;
13. development of culture and artistic creation;
14. nurturing of humanitarian, moral, artistic, and creative values;
15. fulfillment of the citizens' need for entertainment, recreation, sports, and other areas;
16. provision of information to Serbian citizens abroad, as well as the members of the Serbian people who live outside of the Republic of Serbia's territory;
17. representation of the cultural heritage and artistic creation in the country and abroad;
18. provision of information to the foreign public about the events and happenings in the Republic of Serbia.

Community media are exempt from paying the fee for broadcasting license and provision of broadcasting service in accordance with regulations related to state aid.

Finally, the Electronic Media law defines the sources of financing community media. The list includes public funds aimed at project co-financing, grants, donations of citizens, sponsorships and other sources of income, in accordance with a special law.

The Law on Advertising also mentions community media, in the section that regulates the length of TV commercials and teleshopping. For example, Article 35, item 2, stipulates that the length of television commercials on non-commercial TV stations (this refers only to national television, named Serbian Radio Television or RTS) is limited to 10 percent of daily broadcast time.

In accordance with SOKOJ and OFPS tariffs, electronic community media should pay the minimal fee, which is 50% of the minimal fee other media should pay.

2.3. Co-financing projects of public interest in the field of public information through competitions

Co-financing projects of public interest in the field of public information through competitions has been regulated by the Public Information and Media Act and the Regulations on Co-financing Projects of Public Interest in the Field of Public Information.

The Public Information and Media Act stipulates that the Republic of Serbia, its autonomous provinces and local self-governments are obliged to allocate certain funds to projects of public interest in the field of public information and distribute those funds by organizing public competitions.

Eligible candidates include media publishers, as well as legal entities, i.e. entrepreneurs who produce media content and enclose proof that the co-financed media content would be produced for media broadcasting. Candidates may submit proposals for only one project, for only one media outlet. If a candidate publishes more than one media, they can submit one project proposal for each media they publish.

It is then evaluated to what extent the submitted proposals would contribute to public interest in the field of public information, pursuant to Article 15 of this act and to what extent can the applicant guarantee adherence to professional and ethical media standards, based on the submitted documentation.

The proposals are evaluated by committees that should comprise independent media experts and media practitioners who have no conflict of interest and who do not perform any public function.

The Regulations on Co-financing Projects of Public Interest in the Field of Public Information ("Official gazette of RS, no. 16/2016 and 8/2017) define co-financing projects of public interest in the field of public information more closely.

The regulations define what bodies are responsible for organizing a competition, the length of co-financed projects, the methodology of organizing the competition, the content of the public invite, the evaluation criteria, the selection method and the methodology applied by the committee, as well as the obligations of participants related to reporting.

3. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT CO-FINANCING IN MULTIETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN VOJVODINA

3.1. Local media competition hunters

This analysis deals with co-financing media programs in multiethnic communities through competitions between 2017 and 2022 in six cities and municipalities in Vojvodina: Subotica, Sombor, Pančevo, Bački Petrovac, Senta and Novi Sad.

The same matrix has been noticed in all communities – certain media are regular beneficiaries of local “media budgets”, thus partly securing their financial stability, which is against the principles of this model of financing, which focuses not on media, but media programs that improve public information on a local level.

The decisions on allocating the funds also reveal great differences regarding approved projects, since a few media outlets have been regular beneficiaries, while most applicants receive several dozen times less money than those who take the largest share of the “media pie”.

Furthermore, the decisions also reveal that certain media have become “all-rounders” when it comes to competition programs, i.e. their projects get approved regardless of whether they apply for media content, improvement of ethical standards, protection of people with disability in the field of public information, improvement of information in languages of ethnic minorities or some other purpose.

One of the conclusions is that there is a fully established scheme in place, where the same applicants submit proposals and receive money from local budgets in different municipalities and cities. Most of those media are from Novi Sad or Belgrade and we are again talking about media outlets, not programs. Having said that, there are some outlets that absolutely stand out in this “hunt” for local “media competitions”.

The local authorities in the analyzed communities did not have a problem allocating funds to media outlets that had been issued warnings by the Press Council for multiple breaches of standards and the code of ethics. It is common for tabloids to be beneficiaries of local budgets, as entities that work on improving public information. This fact leads to a conclusion that local committees at these competitions completely pay no attention to whether applicants breach the Serbian journalists’ code of ethics.

The research showed that most money from local budgets is given to those media outlets that report positively on the current authorities, to the point that the reporting could be labelled as propaganda. What is more, among regular beneficiaries there are companies and associations unknown to the public outside the context of these competitions. Also, representatives of the media that have existed for a long time, but which are critical of local authorities are never selected at these competitions, nor do they have any insight into the assessment criteria used in the process or into how committee members, who decide on funds allocation, are selected.

3.2. Subotica – cash box for the selected

The city of Subotica generally financed certain media between 2017 and 2022. Among the regular beneficiaries, there are “YU Eco”, “Nove subotičke novine”, VTV Comnet Subotica, “Sucom media”, Noah photo shop and “Dinovizija”.

The cash box in Subotica was used to provide funds to applicants from other cities as well, such as the experienced applicant at media competitions in Vojvodina - Novosadska TV, as well as the Panonija Foundation, “Dunav produkcija” and “Fabrika slova” from Novi Sad. The local authorities did not think twice when they allocated funds to the publisher of “Alo” and “Kurir” tabloids.

The data related to the competitions organized in the analyzed period undoubtedly point out to the fact that the money budgeted for public information in Subotica almost always went to the same beneficiaries, and that some applicants used it to provide regular and stable sources of financing.

In 2017, the budget of the city of Subotica allocated **20.55 million dinars** to 25 applicants at the competition for co-financing projects related to producing media content in the field of public information.

The highest amount was given to VTV Comnet Subotica – 3.9 million dinars, while “YU Eco” television received slightly less – 3.45 million. Next on the list are the “Dani” magazine with 1.87 million dinars and Radio Subotica with 1.85 million dinars. A million dinars was given to the Artline association from Subotica, “Pakis Production” from Novi Sad and “Srbija Danas” from Belgrade, respectively.

They are followed by “Sukom media” with 880,000 dinars, “Nove subotičke novine” with 770,000 dinars, while 500,000 dinars were given to “Snoma”, LLC, “Fabrika slova” from Novi Sad, the journalists’ association CRO-INFO Subotica, respectively, while a slightly lower amount, 493,000 dinars, went to “Medijska mreža Beograd” and “YU Eco”, but this time the radio station, received 450,000 dinars. Other amounts granted were all under 300,000 dinars.

However, the local self-government also made three decisions outside the scope of the competition for co-financing projects related to public information and made **individual grants**: 100,000 to “YU Eco”, 300,000 dinars to “Nove subotičke novine” and 100,000 dinars to “Noah” photo shop from Subotica. These extraordinary expenses were justified with a statement that these projects could not be planned at the time when the competition was organized.

The 2018 public competition for public information saw a slightly bigger budget, **24.7 million dinars**. The funds were received by 35 applicants.

VTV Comnet Subotica and “YU Eco” were once again awarded the highest amounts – 4.0 million dinars each, which is almost a third of the whole “media” budget. Radio Subotica and the “Dani” magazine received around 2.0 million dinars each, while a million and a half went to RTV Panonija from Novi Sad and the Panonija Foundation, respectively. One million dinars went to “YU Eco” and “Panonija” from Novi Sad, respectively. “Sucom media” received 900,000 dinars, while “Artline” and “Nove subotičke novine” received 800,000 dinars, respectively. The

journalists' association CRO-INFO and "Snoma", LLC received 500,000 each, while "Fabrika slova" from Novi Sad was awarded 470,000. Other applicants received lower amounts.

Once again, **individual grants** were awarded subsequently: 500,000 dinars to "Dinovizija" and "Nove subotičke novine", respectively, while 200,000 went to the "Info-inicijativa" association from Subotica. Once again, the justification was the same – the projects could not be planned at the time when the competition was organized.

In 2019, the media budget was much bigger, amounting to **37.1 million dinars**, and 41 applicants received funds.

The highest donations went to YU Eco - 7,5 million dinars for two projects, VTV Subotica was given 4.5 million, the Panonija Foundation received 3.8 million for two projects, Balkan cable TV Novi Sad was given 2.5 million, the "Dani" magazine received 2.4 million, "Nove subotičke novine" and Radio Subotica were awarded 2.0 million each, "Eko medija Subotica" received 1.58 million, "Sucom medija" and "Play" got 1.2 million each, "DVP Digital Novi Sad" was granted one million, while "Artline" received 800,000 dinars. 600,000 dinars went to "Dinovizija", "Snoma", LLC and "Noah" photo shop, respectively, while "Fabrika slova" from Novi Sad received 500,000 dinars. Other applicants received smaller amounts.

In 2020, the budget to be awarded for public information was **40.1 million dinars**. The competition for co-financing projects had a budget of 39.3 million, while 1.9 million was reserved for individual grants.

The public competition saw 42 applicants receive funds. Once again, the highest amount went to "YU Eco" – 7.8 million dinars for two projects. The Panonija Foundation received 2.5 million for two projects. Also, the "Princip Press" company from Belgrade was awarded money for two projects – 2.2. million, along with the Adria Media Group ("Kurir" daily newspaper) from Belgrade, which received 1.1. million dinars. VTV Subotica got 4.5 million dinars, "Nove subotičke novine" 3.0 million, Balkan cable TV from Novi Sad received 2.5 million, the "Dani" magazine got 2.4 million dinars, Radio Subotica 2.0 million, "Eko medija" from Subotica was awarded 1.8 million, the "Sucom" media web portal got 1.2 million, while one million was awarded to Novosadska TV and "Dunav produkcija", respectively. Both Noah photo shop and "Dinovizija" received 633,000 each, while 600,000 went to "Alo" from Belgrade and "Snoma" from Subotica, respectively. "Megvajer" from Subotica received 500,000, while "Impress" from Bačka Topola and "K23" agency from Subotica each received 400,000. Other successful applicants received lower amounts, between 100,000 and 300,000.

However, once again there was an **individual grant** in the amount of one million dinars, which went to RTV Panonija from Novi Sad, because, as the statement said, their project could not be planned when the competition was organized.

The "media" budget of Subotica in 2021 decreased to 33.3 million dinars, awarded to 45 beneficiaries. However, the trend noticed the previous year that beneficiaries from other cities were receiving the funds from the budget of the city of Subotica became even more prominent.

Consequently, Novosadska TV, Balkan cable TV from Novi Sad, as well as "DVP Digital Novi Sad", all now regular beneficiaries, received one million from the budget of the city of

Subotica, respectively. However, they were not the only ones. There are beneficiaries from Belgrade, such as Adria Media Group (publisher of the “Kurir” tabloid), which received 1.1 million for two projects, the “Alo” tabloid was given 600,000 dinars, “Glas nacije” was awarded 500,000, while “Explore Media” was granted 400,000.

The highest amounts were again reserved for “YU Eco”, which got 6.6 million dinars for two projects, VTV Subotica, which received 4.5 million, while the Panonija Foundation received 1.8 million for as many as three projects. The list of standard beneficiaries with regular amounts included the “Dani” magazine with 2.3 million and Radio Subotica with 2.0 million, accompanied by the “Sucom” web portal, which got 1.2 million. “Nove subotičke novine” and “Eko medija” received one million dinars each. Traditional beneficiaries were also “Dinovizija”, which got 513,000 in 2020, the “Noah” photo shop, which received 500,000, as well as the “K23” agency and “Snomi” from Subotica, which received 400,000 dinars, respectively. A completely new beneficiary, but one that received substantial funds was “Milan Šveljo - Video creative team Crvenka”, which got 2.5 million dinars.

In 2022, the budget for public information was again slightly increased and totaled 40.1 million dinars, like in 2020. The funds were awarded to 44 beneficiaries.

“Milan Šveljo” again received 2.5 million, but this time as the “Video creative team Sombor”, instead of Crvenka, as was the case in the year before. The highest amounts were again granted to “YU Eco” – 6.6 million for two projects, VTV Subotica 4.5 million, the “Dani” magazine 3.6 million and the Panonija Foundation 2.3 million for three projects. “Sucom medija” was awarded 2.2 million. 2 million went to Radio Subotica, “V Production Subotica” and “Nove subotičke novine”, respectively. Novosadska TV received more than before – 1.6 million, “Eko medija” got one million, while “Novosti” from Belgrade received 900,000 dinars, unlike “Dnevnik-Poljoprivrednik”, which was given 800,000 dinars. A new beneficiary “ApaOne” from Novi Sad and “Impres” from Bačka Topola each got 600,000. “Fabrika slova” from Novi Sad and “Megvajer” from Subotica received 500,000, respectively, while “Noah” photo shop and Dinovizija got 550,000 each. “Snoma” was awarded 450,000 dinars, while the “K23” agency and the journalists’ association CRO-INFO were given 400,000 dinars, respectively. Other beneficiaries received smaller amounts.

3.3. Pančevo - Mecca for tabloids

The largest share of the local media budget in the analyzed years was being awarded to RTV Pančevo, Radio Pančevo and the “Pančevac” weekly, which apparently can count on competitions for co-financing as a source of regular and stable income.

Local portals *013 info.rs*, *Južni Banat.rs*, *pancevoonline* and a local network of portals “Moj kraj” are among regular beneficiaries.

A significant chunk of the available funds in the analyzed period went to media outlets from other cities, particularly TV Studio B from Belgrade, “Dnevnik” from Novi Sad and “Novosti”.

The citizens of Pančevo also financed the most popular tabloid media in Serbia: “Informer”, “Srpski telegraf”, TV Pink, TV Happy.

In 2017, the budget of Pančevo allocated **24.9 million dinars** to public information, awarded to 11 applicants.

A local outlet “Pančevac” received 4.9 million dinars, “Start press” got 2.0 million, while most of the remaining funds went to beneficiaries from other cities, who received millions of dinars, while local media outlets received much lower amounts – between 100 and 350,000 dinars. Anyway, the list of beneficiaries included “Kriptofest Brus” (6.0 million dinars), PR agency “Stemeg” from Belgrade (5.0 million), “Format”, Čačak (3.8 million), Production of cinematographic products and TV programs, Belgrade (1.2 million) and “Total Media” from Novi Sad (one million dinars).

In 2018, the budget for the contribution to public information rose to **38.0 million dinars**, while the number of beneficiaries also increased to 24. Among them were the leading tabloids in Serbia: “Informer”, “Srpski telegraf”, TV Pink, TV Happy. They all received 500,000 dinars, respectively, for providing information to the citizens of Pančevo. Other media that are not from Pančevo also received significant amounts: TV Studio B – 2.0 million, the “Dnevnik” daily and the *srbijadanas.com* portal one million each.

The largest amount was awarded to RTV Pančevo, as much as 12.0 million, which was almost a third of the whole budget, for two projects. The “Pančevac” weekly got 5.0 million, “Pančevo.rs” portal was given 4.1 million, “Start press” from Pančevo 2.3 million, Radio Pančevo 2.25 million, Radio Bus 1.9 million, 013 info.rs 1.35 million for two projects, Južni Banat.rs 1.3 million, pancevoonline.rs portal 600,000 dinars and the “Moj kraj” local network of portals received 500,000. Other beneficiaries received lower amounts, ranging from 100,000 to 350,000 dinars.

“Južni Banat.rs” received additional 1.9 million dinars through an individual grant.

In 2019, the city of Pančevo again allocated **38.0 million dinars** for media content creation, and the funds were awarded to 24 beneficiaries, again.

RTV Pančevo was awarded a larger share of the whole “media budget” of the city, i.e. 16.26 million dinars for three projects. The Pančevac weekly received 5.0 million, the *epancevo.rs* portal was awarded 3.19 million, the “Start 013” daily got 2.28 million, while the “013info.rs” portal was awarded 1.2 million.

New portals that became the beneficiaries of the city of Pančevo’s budget were *abcsport.rs*, awarded 1.2 million for two projects, *lokalnevesti.rs* got 970,000, *republika.rs* received 700,000, *zeleniminuti.rs* got 650,000, while *embargo.rs* received 500,000. The “Moj kraj” local network of portals received 900,000 dinars. *Srbijadanas.com* was given 500,000, while “Dnevnik” from Novi Sad got one million dinars.

“Informer” was again awarded 500,000, “Večernje Novosti” got 400,000, while TV Studio B received 1.65 million.

The remaining funds were distributed in much smaller amounts to other beneficiaries.

The budget for media content in 2020 was increased to 40.0 million dinars, and the funds were again granted to 24 beneficiaries.

The largest amount, though smaller than the previous year, went to RTV Pančevo – 11 million, while Radio Pančevo was awarded 8 million, the “Pančevac” weekly got 5.05 million dinars. Local portal *start013.rs* received 2.15 million, *epancevo.rs* 1.7 million, *mojkraj.rs* 1.3 million, *lokalnevesti.rs* 1.24 million, *013info.rs* 1.25 million dinars, while *zeleniminuti.rs* got 850,000 dinars. “Starčevačke novine” were given 650,000 dinars.

The *srbijadanas.com* portal got one million dinars, as much as Studio B was awarded at the local competition in Pančevo. Belgrade portals *espresso.rs* and *embargo.rs* were awarded 800,000 and 500,000, respectively. The “Dnevnik” daily received 1.5 million dinars. Tabloids “Informer” and “Srpski telegraf” traditionally received 500,000 dinars each.

In 2021, the budget for the contribution to public information in Pančevo remained **40.0 million dinars**, awarded to 22 beneficiaries.

Even though the list of beneficiaries did not include “Informer”, money from the budget of Pančevo was given to tabloids “Kurir” – 800,000 and “Alo” – 600,000 dinars. “Novosti” got slightly less – 300,000, while TV Studio B received 700,000 dinars. Belgrade-based portals were also among the beneficiaries: *embargo.rs* got 500,000, while *24sedam.rs* and *srbijadanas.com* received one million each. “Dnevnik” from Novi Sad also got one million dinars.

Among local portals, the most money was received by *start103.rs* – 1.94 million, followed by *epancevo.rs* – 1.5 million, *mojkraj.rs* -1.25 million, *lokalnevesti.rs* – 1.08 million, *013info.rs* – one million and *zeleniminuti.rs* – 800,000. “Starčevačke novine” received 660,000 dinars.

Just like previous years, the largest share of the media budget went to RTV Pančevo – 14.0 million, Radio Pančevo – 6.0 million, while “Pančevac” got 5.1 million.

At the latest competition, organized in 2022, the budget allocation for media content was once again **40.0 million dinars**, awarded to 22 beneficiaries.

Five beneficiaries received under 300,000, while more generous amounts went to standard beneficiaries. The largest share again went to RTV Pančevo – 13 million, followed by Radio Pančevo with 7.3 million and “Pančevac” with 5.1 million dinars. The *epancevo.rs* portal received 2.5 million, *start013.rs* received 1.75 million, *pancevomojkraj.rs* 900,000, *zeleniminuti.rs* 800,000, *zdravopancevo.rs* 530,000, and “Starčevačke novine” got 700,000 dinars.

The *24sedam.rs* portal received a million dinars, *embargo.rs* got 500,000, while *najlepseizsrbije.rs* was awarded 600,000 dinars. The “Dnevnik” daily got one million dinars, while “Dnevnik-Poljoprivrednik” received 700,000.

TV Studio B was again a beneficiary and was awarded a million dinars from the budget of Pančevo. There were also traditional grants to Belgrade tabloids “Alo” (900,000) and “Kurir” (800,000).

3.4. Sombor - copy-pasted lists of beneficiaries

The “media budget” of Sombor is much more modest than Pančevo’s, but that did not prevent the local committee from granting funds to applicants from other cities, along with the

“selected” local media (with the exception of SO Open, which has often returned the awarded funds to the city, thus protecting professional principles).

The traditional beneficiaries that are traditionally awarded the highest grants include the “Ja volim Sombor” citizens’ association, “Somborske novine” with 1.6 million, KA 54 Sombor and RTV Radio Sreće. However, the list of most frequent beneficiaries also includes “Fabrika slova” from Novi Sad, “News media team” from Belgrade and VTV Subotica.

Among the successful applicants are also “Video kreativna tim Milan Šveljo”, “Dunav produkcija” Novi Sad and Novosadska TV – infamous local competition hunters. Other applicants that were frequently awarded funds include “Glas nacije” and Radio SPC Blagovesnik, while a beneficiary at the latest competition was also the news-marketing center Kula.

For 2017, the official website of the city offers a document entitled “Decision on allocation of funds for co-financing projects of public interest in the field of public information in the city of Sombor in 2017”, but it is not available, since it cannot be opened.

In 2018, the city of Sombor allocated **12.0 million dinars** to 22 projects related to media content production.

The highest amount was given to KA-54 Sombor – 1.9 million, followed by “Somborske novine” with 1.6 million and HKD Vladimir Nazor, which received a million dinars for its show in the Croatian language.

A million dinars went to News media team Belgrade, while RTV Radio Sreće got 990,000 dinars. A slightly lower amount, 950,000, was awarded to the “Ja volim Sombor” citizens’ association. “ZOANA Press” received 800,000, Radio BB 500,000, while “025 Info” and Radio SCP Blagovesnik each got 400,000. Other amounts granted were lower and it is interesting to note that one of the successful applicants was the critical “SOinfo” outlet, which received 90,000.

In 2019, the amount envisaged for media production was slightly higher and totaled **14.0 million dinars**, awarded to 23 beneficiaries.

Larger amounts were again shared among the same beneficiaries. Radio sreće received the most – 2.15 million, followed by “Ja volim Sombor” with 1.7 million, “Somborske novine” with 1.6 million, “KA 54” Sombor with 1.2 million, “025 Info” with 1.1 million and “DVP produkcija” with one million dinars. “ZOANA Press” got 950,000, Radio BB 510,000, while “Fabrika slova” and “AB Media” Belgrade each got 500,000 dinars. 400,000 dinars went to “Proglas Public relations” and Radio SPC Blagovesnik, respectively. Other beneficiaries were granted much lower amounts.

In 2020, the city of Sombor allocated 16.0 million dinars to media production and the money was awarded to 23 beneficiaries.

The list of beneficiaries was almost identical to the previous ones, but there were some new introductions.

Again, millions went to traditional beneficiaries: Radio sreće – 2.12 million, “KA 54” and “Ja volim Sombor” – 1.7 million each and “Somborske novine” – 1.6 million.

New beneficiaries that received a million dinars each are “Dunav produkcija” Novi Sad and Novosadska TV. They are followed by Radio BB with 860,000, “Dunav televizija” with 800,000, “Stefan Street” with 700,000 and “SO Open” with 600,000. “News media team” Belgrade, “ZOANA press” and “Glas nacije” each got half a million dinars, while Radio SPC Blagovesnik received its traditional 400,000 dinars.

In 2021, the budget was once again **16.0 million dinars**, but the number of beneficiaries dropped to 16.

TV Sombor with 2.4 million and “Ja volim Sombor” received the highest grants. They were followed by KA 54 with 1.8 million, Novosadska TV with 1.5 million, VTV Subotica with 1.4 million and “Somborske novine” with 1.3 million dinars. A 1.8-million grant was awarded to “Video kreativna tim Milan Šveljo”, which also received funds at the competition in Subotica.

One million went to “Stefan Street”, while “Info net” received 700,000. The “Podium” Association from Sombor got 500,000, while 400,000 went to the SOPEK association, “SO open” and Radio SPC Blagovesnik, respectively.

At the latest competition, in 2022, the city allocated **18.0 million dinars** for media projects and awarded funds to 18 applicants.

Once again, traditional beneficiaries included “Ja volim Sombor”, which got 2.2 million dinars, KA 54 (1.8 million) and “Somborske novine”, which was granted 1.6 million dinars. VTV Subotica, Novosadska TV and “Video kreativna tim Milan Šveljo” got 1.5 million dinars, respectively.

A new beneficiary was the News-marketing center Kula, which was awarded one million dinars. UG SO open received 550,000 and “Podium” Sombor got half a million dinars. Traditionally, Radio SPC Blagovesnik received its “usual” 400,000 dinars.

3.5. Bački Petrovac – A small buffet, but enough food for the selected

Although the most modest among the analyzed budgets, it still managed to attract the attention of the contestants for the Guinness record in the number of participations in the analyzed media competitions.

Novosadska TV, “Dnevnik” and “Panonija” diligently applied for the funds and were almost always successful, even receiving more money than traditional local media of ethnic minorities. Even some outlets from Belgrade, such as the *Srbija danas* portal or *Medijske mreže* Belgrade knew how to make the most of the budget of Bački Petrovac and on one occasion the “Informer” tabloid received funds.

Local media TV Petrovec and Radio Petrovec, as outlets recognized as loyal to the local authorities, regularly received certain amounts from the local budget, unlike the outlets that

were not loyal, but in 2020, for example, no local applicant was successful.

In 2017, the municipality of Bački Petrovac envisaged only **3.5 million dinars** for media content and the funds went to 9 applicants.

The traditional media outlets of ethnic minority groups, TV Petrovec and Radio Petrovec, received 600,000 each, while BB Radio Blu from Bački Brestovac received 100,000 dinars.

A prominent curiosity from that year's competition was that most money from a rather modest media budget went to media outlets from Belgrade and Novi Sad, which do not even have shows in the Slovakian language. For instance, "Brif media net" from Novi Sad received as much as one million dinars, Delta TV from Novi Sad got 300,000, as much as "Srbija danas" from Belgrade. 200,000 dinars was given to Medijska mreža Beograd, Invictus media Beograd, and the "Informer" tabloid, respectively.

In 2018, the media budget was 4.0 million dinars and the funds went to 10 beneficiaries.

The largest amount went to Novosadska TV – 1.3 million dinars, while the local Novi Radio Petrovec received 400,000. Only one more selected beneficiary operated locally - Slovački izdavački centar, which received only 100,000. All other beneficiaries were from other cities and town.

A significant amount was "earned" by Delta TV – 950,000 dinars, while "Panonija medija Novi Sad" got 300,000. There was also an association from Novi Sad "Media portal", which received 200,000, "Invitem" from Kać, which got 310,000, as well as the Union of Journalists of Serbia, which was given 240,000. 100,000 dinars went to "Dnevnik-Poljoprivrednik", and the Alliance of Serbs from the Region for the project "Serbian Wheel-dance".

In 2019, the budget for media content was **5.0 million dinars**, which was awarded to 12 beneficiaries and the largest amounts again went to other cities and municipalities.

Novosadska TV and Delta TV each received one million dinars, NEBS Media team from Belgrade got 500,000, RTV Bačka Palanka 400,000 for two projects, TV Bačka – VZV Vrbas 250,000, Objektiv media NS 100,000, Invitem from Kać got 400,000, the "Media Portal" association from Novi Sad received 300,000, while 200,000 dinars went to DVP Produkcija.

The local outlets from Bački Petrovac were left to share just a small portion of the budget: TV Petrovec got 700,000 and Novi radio Petrovec got 150,000.

In 2020, the budget for media content was **5.5 million dinars**, and the funds were awarded to eight beneficiaries.

The largest amounts were again given to Novosadska TV, TV Delta and TV Bačka – studio in Vrbas. Dunav TV from Pančevo got 700,000, while "Dunav produkcija" (the "Dnevnik" daily from Novi Sad is listed as the beneficiary) from Novi Sad got 500,000. Invitem from Kać and "Fabrika slova" from Novi Sad also got 500,000 each. The "Moja Bačka Palanka" association received 300,000 dinars.

Not a single applicant from the municipality of Bački Petrovac received any funds at this competition!

In 2021, the budget for media projects remained the same – **5.5 million dinars**, which went to six beneficiaries.

This time, funds were also given to TV Petrovec – 2.0 million dinars and Novi radio Petrovec – one million dinars.

They were accompanied by regular beneficiaries, such as Novosadska TV and TV Delta, which were awarded 700,000 each. Other beneficiaries also came from other municipalities: “Markons” marketing agency (the “Dnevnik” daily was listed as the beneficiary) from Novi Sad received 600,000, while VTV Subotica - studio TV Bačka Vrbas got 500,000 dinars.

The competition in 2022 saw **5,85 million dinars** awarded to six applicants.

Naturally, among them were the regular beneficiaries, such as Novosadska TV, which got 700,000 and TV Delta, which got 600,000 dinars. “Invitem” from Kać (Radio Jugović) received 800,000, while VTV Subotica (TV Bačka-Vrbas) was awarded 750,000 dinars.

TV Petrovec received 2.0 million, while Novi radio Petrovec received one million dinars.

3.6. Senta - When there is enough for everyone, then everything is given to one

The municipality of Senta envisaged much smaller budgets for media content, i.e. the annual spending never exceeded half a million dinars. In the first two year of the observed period, the beneficiaries were outlets in languages of ethnic minorities or bilingual media outlets. However, there were years when even such small funds were allocated to, for example, applicants from Niš.

Once, the whole annual media budget was awarded to a single applicant – “Brif Media Net” from Novi Sad, an infamous beneficiary of local media budgets and a favorite of local media committee in the cities and municipalities in Vojvodina encompassed by this analysis.

In 2017, the local budget envisaged only **200,000 dinars** for media content in Hungarian. Half of that amount was shared between “Vajdasag Ma” and “No limit” radio, while 100,000 went to “Pro Media” for informing people with disability.

The same beneficiaries received the same amounts in 2018, as well.

In 2019, the amount envisaged for providing information in Hungarian was **400,000**, and was awarded to “Vajdasag Ma” and “Fox Media” in equal measure.

For projects related to public information aimed at people with disability, the total budget was **200,000 dinars**, distributed to three beneficiaries: “Novosti dana” (Niš – Medijana) – 50,000, “Reorganizacija”, LLC Niš – 50,000 and “Pro Media” from Senta – 100,000 dinars.

There is no information about the distribution of the 2020 “media budget” on the official website of the municipality.

In 2021, the total “media budget” of **500,000 dinars** was awarded to one beneficiary only – “Brif Media net” from Novi Sad!

The latest competition in 2022 was announced on 14th October, but at the time when this analysis was being written, there were no results available.

3.7. Novi Sad - Media cake for proven applicants

During the observed six-year period, from 2017 to 2022, it was noticeable that it was almost always the same applicants who have been successful at the competitions for funds aimed at public information. The rule was that the largest amounts were always awarded to the same beneficiaries. Hence, the final decisions regarding the allocation of money from the city of Novi Sad’s budget confirmed that the successful applicants were the known, “proven” players on local, and not just local, media scene. The list of beneficiaries includes not only media outlets, but also associations, enterprises and other organizations. Again, the beneficiaries were always those who were pro-local authorities and unwilling to understand that public information should primarily serve the interest of the same public. The largest share of the funds was traditionally awarded to Novosadska TV, which participated in the competitions with different programs and always had at least one project accepted.

It should be noted that the “media competition” in Novi Sad is different from similar competitions in other cities and municipalities in Vojvodina because the envisaged funds for public information are allocated in several different programs/categories: for media content, for public information in languages of ethnic minorities, for improvement of public information aimed at people with disability and for improvement of professional and ethical standards. This categorization, however, is not reflected in the type of applicants participating in the competitions. Namely, several of them had become specialists in several categories and were consequently granted funds in different categories regularly. Among them, naturally, was the aforementioned Novosadska TV. Furthermore, there is “Zavičajno udruženje” Futog, which had successful projects in all programs.

Quite common were the instances of media outlets from outside Novi Sad (Subotica, Pančevo, Belgrade) being awarded funds. One of the regular beneficiaries of the funds awarded by the city of Novi Sad is the “Alo” tabloid. Apart from “Alo”, the Novi Sad “media budget” regularly financed the “Novosti” company from Belgrade.

Among the “favourites” of every committee in Novi Sad were, apart from Novosadska TV and “Zavičajno udruženje Futog”, “Brif media net”, “Fabrika slova”, “Delta TV”, “Dnevnik”, “Master media mix”, “Invitem” Kać, “Ninamedia”, IN Radio, the Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina...

Financing public information in Novi Sad is also specific because there are almost always two competitions each year, but the successful applications in both rounds are typically the same.

In 2017, the city's budget allocated **51.78 million dinars**, 4.1 million of which was awarded for public information in languages of ethnic minorities, 4.3 million for the interest of people with disability in the field of public information and 900,000 dinars was for projects aimed at organizing and participating in professional, scientific and other relevant events and improving professional and ethical standards in the field of public information.

Therefore, 42.43 million dinars was awarded **for media content**, and 47 beneficiaries received some funds. The largest amounts were received by "Brif media net" – 3.5 million; TV Delta, NS-AS (production, trading and services) and Media info centar NS – 3.0 million dinars each. They were followed by "Srbija danas" from Belgrade with 2.8 million, "Shpeera production" Futog with 2.47 million; "Fabrika slova" with 2.0 million; "Master media mix NS" with 1.9 million; TV Most with 1.7 million; "Invitem" from Kać with 1.6 million and Ninamedia with 1.2 million dinars. One million dinars went to Info IT media Beograd, Radio 021, "Promo produkcija" Šid, Magic production Ljukovo, "Tesla global forum" association and Pakis production NS each. "Front culture" Novi Sad got 960,000, the "Ariadne" association 950,000, "Medijska mreža" Belgrade 900,000 and "BB media" Bački Brestovac 750,000 dinars. The Eparchy of Bačka of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) received 700,000 dinars. 500,000 dinars was awarded to the "Dnevnik" daily, JAZAS Youth, "Lokal media NS" and Pečat D. Other beneficiaries received smaller amounts.

There were 14 beneficiaries in the category of **public information in languages of ethnic minorities**. The largest amount was awarded to Most TV for the "Russian news bulletin" project – 1.0 million dinars. RTV Signal, IN Radio and "Kopernikus" received 600,000 each, while other amounts were lower, ranging from 50,000 to 300,000 dinars, and they mostly went to associations of ethnic minorities.

The budget envisaged for **public information of people with disability** was shared among 12 beneficiaries, among whom the largest amounts went to "Brif media net" – one million dinars, "Invitem" from Kać got 700,000 and "Kraftkor" received 600,000 dinars.

The amount envisaged **for professional events and ethical standards** went to three beneficiaries: 500,000 went to the Journalists' Association of Vojvodina, 300,000 was given to "Heror media point" and 100,000 went to the Association of Internet Portals.

The beneficiaries of this competitions received the funds in May 2017, but after **another competition in October 2017** additional 13 million dinars became available. "Lokal media" Novi Sad and Media info centar Novi Sad received 3.0 million each, "Marcons" got 1.9 million, "Total media" Novi Sad was given 1.6 million, "Market IT marketing and PR" received 1.5 million; "Invitem" from Kać received 800,000; while "TP Zoom NS", "Ninamedia" i "RTV Signal" were given 400,000 dinars each.

In 2018, a larger amount than previous year was set aside for projects in the field of public information – **65.2 million dinars**.

43.5 million was envisaged for **media content** and shared among 58 beneficiaries. The largest share went to Novosadska TV – 6.0 million, "Dnevnik" and "NS-AS" got 3.0 million dinars each. Millions were also granted to "Fabrika slova NS" and "Ninamedia" (2.0 million each), "Votens" Veternik got 1.8 million; Delta TV, "Hashtag digital media group (Novi Sad

uživo) and Market IT received 1.5 million each, “Planeta 21000”, “Zoom NS”, “Master media mix NS”, RTV Panonija and “Info IT media” from Belgrade each got one million dinars. “Invitem” from Kać got 800,000, while “Bumerang NS” received 700,000 dinars. Several beneficiaries received 500,000, such as TV Most, “Posmatrač” Association from Belgrade, “Novosti” daily, AB Media BG, 021, Happy TV...

For projects aimed at providing **public information to ethnic minorities** and ethnic communities 6.4 million was granted to 13 beneficiaries. The largest amount went to Novosadska TV – 1.3 million, followed by “Razvojni centar Comnet NS” with one million dinars, IN Radio with 800,000, “Ariadne” Association and “Bumerang” with 600,000 each and “Phraline” Association with 500,000. Other beneficiaries received smaller amounts.

For the projects related to protection of interest of people with disability in the field of public information, the city allocated 4.3 million to 12 beneficiaries. The largest grant went to IN Radio – 800,000, “Invitem” from Kać and Novosadska TV received 500,000 each, while “Panonija media” got 400,000 dinars. Other beneficiaries received between 200,000 and 300,000 dinars.

For the purpose of **improving ethical standards**, 1.6 million went to four beneficiaries. “Heror media point” received one million dinars, while 200,000 went to the Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina, the Internet Portals Association Novi Sad and the Ruthenian Journalists’ Association.

The same year saw **another media competition** for additional 9.1 million dinars. The funds went to 24 beneficiaries in the category of media content and five beneficiaries in the category of protecting the rights of minority communities. Novosadska TV and “Brif media net” were again among the selected beneficiaries, while the Eparchy of Bačka (SPC) also received money envisaged for minorities.

For projects of public interest in the field of public information in 2019, the city set aside **57.16 million dinars**. The largest share, 45.5 million, was for projects related to media content creation. 5.5 million was allocated to national minorities and ethnic communities, while 5.0 million was for protecting the interest of people with disability and 1.5 million was for improving professional and ethical standards.

48 projects were approved at the **media competition**. The largest amounts were again given to Novosadska TV – 5.9 million and “Dnevnik” daily – 4.8 million. Millions were also given to NSAS (2.7 million), DVP Digital (2.3 million), “Fabrika slova” (2.0 million), Ninamedia (1.9 million), “Brif media net” (1.8 million), IN Radio and Delta TV each got 1.7 million, DVP Produkcija (1.4 million), as well as “Planeta 21000” and RTV Panonija (1.0 million). Belgrade-based media were also given funds from the Novi Sad’s budget: “Info IT media” and “Emit 24” each got 900,000, “Explore media” received 700,000, “Novosti”, “Glas nacije” and “News media team” each got 500,000 dinars. The same amount, half a million, went to Invitem from Kać, “Sirmium produkcija”, “Objektiv media” Irig, “Peritus” Association and “Novosadski Kutak”. The “Golubica” association and “Votens” Veternik each got 700,000 dinars, 021 received 800,000; Radio Sajam, “Input LL” Petrovaradin and “Master media mix” received 900,000 each.

The “minority” budget was distributed to 10 beneficiaries. More than half of the total

amount went to Novosadska TV – 1.98 million and “Invitem” from Kać – 1.1 million. IN Radio received around 600,000, while other beneficiaries received around 200,000 dinars each.

The budget for **exercising rights of people with disability** in the field of public information was awarded to ten beneficiaries. The highest grants were again given to Novosadska TV – 1.0 million, “Humani tim” Belgrade got 800,000, while “Zavičajno udruženje” Futog received around 700,000 dinars. 500,000 went to “Brif media net”, “Invitem” from Kać and “Proglas public relations” enterprise from Belgrade. The amounts granted to other beneficiaries were much smaller.

For the **improvement of ethical standards**, a project by “Heror media point NS” received one million dinars, while “Zavičajno udruženje Futog” got 300,000 and the Journalists’ Association got 200,000.

The budget for public information in 2020 was much lower than before and totaled **33.65 million dinars**.

Out of that amount, 25.2 million was allocated to **media content**, i.e. as many as 52 beneficiaries. The first on the list was again Novosadska TV, which got 3.1 million for two projects. Next on the list were Delta TV with 1.4 million; “Fabrika slova”, “DVP Produkcija” and “Dunav produkcija” with 1.3 million each, “Ninamedia” with 1.1 million, and DVP Digital and “NS-AS” with one million dinars each. Other approved projects were submitted by IN Radio, which got 900,000, 021 received 800,000, while “Kanal 9” and “Planeta 21000” each got 600,000 dinars. Among those who received half a million, there were some traditional beneficiaries, such as “Novosti”, but some new outlets from Belgrade as well, such as “Adria media group”, Ringier Axel Springer, as well as the “Alo” tabloid. It is interesting to note that among the beneficiaries was also RTV Pančevo, which received 300,000 dinars.

For improving public information in **the languages of ethnic minorities**, the total budget was 4.3 million dinars. Novosadska TV and IN Radio each got one million dinars, “Invitem” from Kać 700,000, while Kanal 9 and Balkan cable TV each got 500,000 dinars. Other four beneficiaries received between 100,000 and 200,000 dinars.

The amount of 4.1 million dinars for improving the public information regarding **people with disability** was granted to 13 beneficiaries. Novosadska TV was once again among them, since it got 900,000. The CNN Vojvodina news association and “Zavičajno udruženje Futog” each got 700,000. Among other beneficiaries, which received lower amounts, were “Brif media net”, “Invitem Kać” and the Eparchy of Bačka (SPC).

However, the city organized **another “media competition”** later that year and distributed 15 million dinars. 14 million went to projects related to media content, while one million was awarded for professional and scientific events.

This additional portion was shared by 27 beneficiaries. The list is more or less standard. Novosadska TV got 2.0 million; “DVP Produkcija” 1.95 million; “Master media mix” received 1.9 million; the “Golubica” association, Balkan cable TV and Input LL received around 800,000 each, while IN Radio, Delta TV and “Brif media net” each got half a million dinars.

The budget for organizing professional and scientific events in order to **improve ethical standards** in the field of public information was allocated to “Zavičajno udruženje Futog”, |Heror media pont” and the Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina.

In 2021, the amount for public information was even smaller - **29 million dinars**, most of which was envisaged for media content, while only 300,000 was supposed to be used for professional events and **improvement of ethical standards**. This whole amount was given to the Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina for the project entitles “International Media Award “Golden Quill” and Annual Awards of JAV”.

The media budget was allocated to well-known beneficiaries, 55 of them in total. Novosadska TV received 5.05 million for two projects; “Dnevnik” received 2.5 million, “Master media mix” got 1.7 million, “Input LL” 1.5 million, Balkan cable TV 1.2 million, while one million dinars went to “Dunav produkcija”, “NS-AS”, “Fabrika slova”, “Novosti” and “Alo”, respectively. 800,000 went to IN Radio, “Invitem” from Kaća and Radio Sajam, respectively. “Zavičajno udruženje Futog” received 700,000, while “Brif media net” got 600,000 dinars. Half a million was distributed to “Objektiv media NS” from Irig, VTV Subotica, Delta TV, “Novosadski Kutak”, “Rec-on production NS” and “Telperion communications NS”. Other beneficiaries received smaller amounts, most of them as little as 100,000 dinars.

At the latest competition in 2022, the budget for public information was doubled in comparison to the previous year. A total of **61.6 million dinars** was prepared, 51.95 million of which was for **media content**, and that amount financed 70 projects.

For two approved projects, Novosadska TV received 7.5 million, while “Dnevnik” got 5.0 million. IN radio, “Mondo inc” from Belgrade and Adria media group (which saw four of its projects approved) each got 2.5 million, while Balkan cable TV received 2.0 million dinars. A million and a half was awarded to “NS-AS”, “DVP Produkcija” and “DVP Digital”, respectively. “Fabrika slova”, “Ninamedia”, “Glas nacije Beograd-Zemun”, Delta TV, “Master media mix”, Radio Sajam and “Alo” each got one million dinars. “Invitem” from Kać, 021 and the “Golubica” association each got 800,000 dinars, while “Divelion produkcija” from Belgrade and the CNN Vojvodina news association each got 600,000. Among the applicants who received half a million dinars, there are RTV Signal, VTV Subotica, Kanal 9, “Input LL”, Sremska TV... 19 other projects were awarded between 100,000 and 200,000 dinars.

4.2 million was reserved for **public information of ethnic minorities** and eight beneficiaries were awarded funds. The highest amount was given to Novosadska TV (1.13 million) and Kanal 9 (one million dinars). Next on the list are “Invitem from Kać with 800,000 and RTV Signal with 670,000 dinars. Other beneficiaries received between 100,000 and 200,000 dinars.

The funds for **improving public information of people with disability** in the amount of 3.85 million were also distributed to well-known beneficiaries. Novosadska TV received 1.5 million for two projects, “Zavičajno udruženje Futog” got 550,000, while Kanal 9 was given 500,000. Other seven beneficiaries received between 100,000 and 250,000 each.

1.6 million dinars was supposed to be used for improving ethical standards. Half a million was given to “Heror media pont” in Novi Sad and, traditionally, to “Zavičajno udruženje Futog”

each. The remaining amount of 600,000 dinars was shared by the Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (300,000), the Union of Journalists of Serbia (200,000) and "Akademac" center (100,000).

4. MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

In the conversations with media professionals, several topics were problematized, which are vital for any analysis of the position of journalists. Some of those topics include questions related to competition co-financing, safety, discrimination, ethical and professional standards.

In order to prevent the conversations going towards a certain framework by asking direct questions related to these aspects, we opted to ask them to list, in their opinion, the biggest problems of journalism and media in Serbia. Almost all interviewees believe that **unprofessionalism, breach of ethical and professional standards, commercialization and sensationalism** are the major problems in the media industry in Serbia.

The biggest problem is the level of professionalism among journalists and the relationship between journalists and authorities at all levels. I think it is related to the professionalism of journalists, because if you have journalists who do not understand what professionalism means, who do not know enough about the topics they are dealing with, then we get into a situation where authorities, either political or economic powers, can impact the work of journalists and put them in a role of a messenger who places information that suits those in power.

Lack of objectivity, censorship and self-censorship, finances directed towards media, as well. But I think that is a consequence of censorship and self-censorship. That's how those financing channels are created, also because of a large number of unqualified people.

Actually, there are many problems. Journalism is becoming increasingly superficial, more and more space is being occupied by commercial TV stations and tabloids, and I see fewer and fewer journalists in the true sense of the word. If you don't have anyone behind you, the state or the owner, it is very difficult for you to survive financially as an independent journalist, which leads you to adapting to the current needs of consumers, which are getting more and more superficial. And if you are a media outlet in a language of an ethnic minority, the situation is even more difficult, because the market is much smaller, which means less potential for subscribers and commercial revenue...

A strategic and the most serious problem is failure to renew the pool of journalists with young people ready to choose journalism as their career. Another serious problem is sensationalism, followed by breaching the standards and professional rules, clientelism, i.e. too close a relationship between journalists and those who hold power and come from political, economic or party lobbies.

The biggest problem is that we still haven't defined who a journalist is and what journalism actually represents. We have an infestation of those bot-portals, i.e. bot media and tabloids, which create utter confusion... Breaches of the code of ethics are a daily occurrence, standards are not being applied.

Well, it all depends... If we compare ourselves with the EU and that “free world”, the media in Serbia are different, primarily because they are dominated by unfree, unprofessional media, i.e. media that do not conduct business in accordance with the general or the Serbian journalists’ code of ethics. I’d say that media are only those that respect the journalists’ code of ethics. When it comes to media in languages of ethnic minorities, they are in an even more difficult situation.

As a significant problem, our interviewees also emphasize the influence of public officials, i.e. political pressures, which lead to self-censorship.

The biggest problem are political pressures, which lead to censorship and self-censorship among journalists and those are issues present in all newsrooms, regardless of the language. On the other hand, when it comes to the media founded by the Hungarian National Council, I think the pressure and its intensity is the same as in most media outlets in Serbia.

In my opinion, the strongest pressure comes from the roof problem – and that is the pressure put on media. “If you’re not one of us, if you’re not from our party, we’ll put all sorts of pressures on you”. That leads to sustainability issues, financial problems...

We have a state (party) apparatus that controls the largest part of the information system, supervises the flow of information, manages journalists, media, regulatory bodies... The very same state doesn’t obey its own laws and nurtures officials who allow themselves to have an inappropriate attitude towards media. Also, another serious problem is that the “system” controls the flow of money.

When it comes to media in the languages of ethnic minorities, a specific problem is a lack of personnel, although the same complaint can be heard from local media that report in the Serbian language.

Let me give you a concrete example... We don’t have a wide choice of candidates in the Slovakian community. I look for a particular profile and I can’t find it. For example, there was a project financed by EED and it was a challenge to find a women journalist. Luckily, the portal was in two languages, so I could hire a women journalist from the other community, but I still had to find an associate who spoke Slovakian to create content. If I were to extend the newsroom and looked for someone who spoke and wrote in Slovakian, I’d be in trouble, since there is also the question of how qualified the candidate is. On the other hand, multimedia content, presence on social networks and bringing a community together are all very important to us.

Perhaps a lack of personnel, there aren’t enough good journalists here in Subotica. And if there are good journalists, they all work in outlets close to the authorities, where they have guaranteed salaries, which is why they don’t intend to change anything.

The research showed that a lack of media pluralism is also problematic, along with impossibility to ensure long-term financing and self-sustainability in general.

Instead of making that the aim of development of media strategy and media scene, we’re witnessing a situation in which there are powerful interests for media with independent newsroom policy to cease to exist, which is why their lives are made difficult in most original ways, which makes their daily operations rather challenging. I also see a lack of personnel as a serious problem.

Those newsrooms that are not connected with the centers of financial and political powers are not only unsustainable, but they barely manage to survive primarily due to volunteering.

The biggest problem is that, if we look at small local media outlets, it's difficult to secure long-term financing. That might be the root of all problems, because no matter how much we might love journalism, we also need to make the ends meet. So, loving something is not enough, but it's complicated to survive, since local competitions are closed to us and if they are not, we're talking about small amounts, which are really not sufficient... Therefore, securing long-term financing is the most challenging thing if we want to keep the same number of people working. While that might be the greatest challenge, it's also difficult to obtain some information, but we've sort of got used to it and can produce content despite such problems.

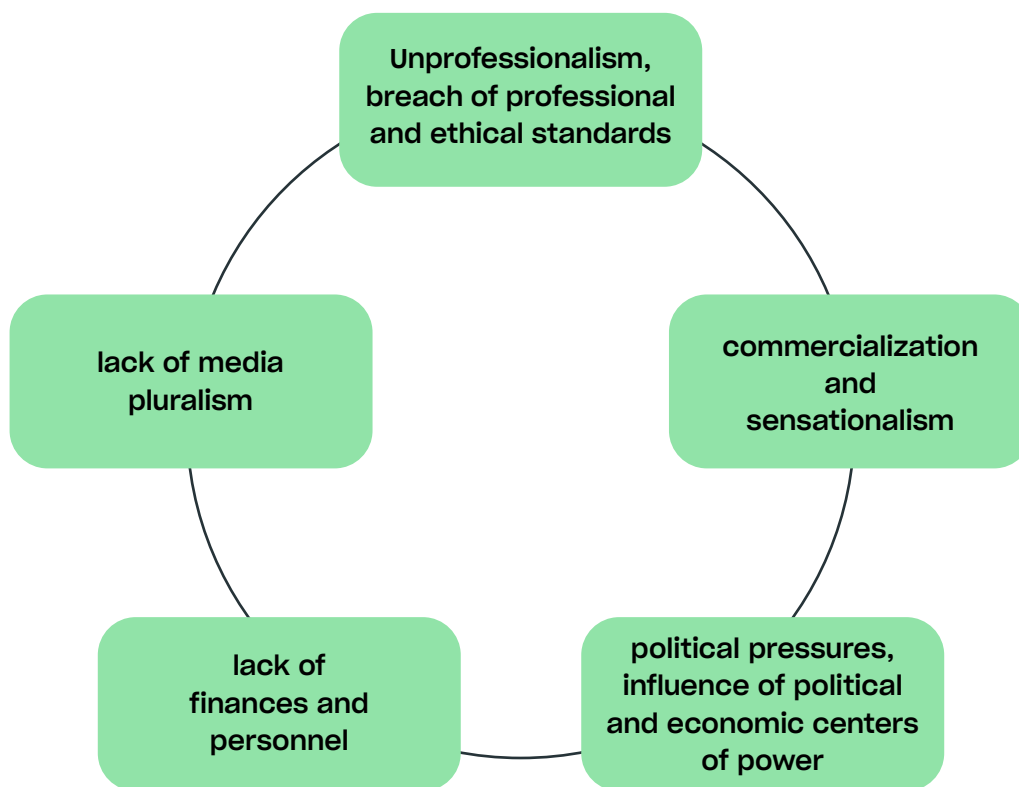


Table 1. Problems related to journalism and media in the Republic of Serbia

4.1. Financial sustainability of media

When it comes to the financial aspect, the results of the research show that the basic difference is in the type of media the interviewees work for. Based on the answers, it can be said that the most stable financial situation in terms of finances and regular income is in weeklies founded by the national councils of national minorities, followed by the provincial public broadcasting company (RTV), while the greatest problems with providing stable financing are experienced by owners, editors and journalists working at local commercial outlets and community media.

The media outlets founded by the Councils of National Minorities on the territory of

the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina receive funds from the budget of AP Vojvodina. The interviewees believe that otherwise the existence of such media in languages of ethnic minorities would be under threat or they would not be able to operate in the present capacity.

Our main source of financing is the provincial budget, because all media in the languages of ethnic minorities receive financial resource from the province. Each year, we sign an agreement, which guarantees income for the following year. The following year, we sign another one. That's the situation with all media in languages of ethnic minorities and that is some kind of hereditary right, so to say... So, we now have a situation that our budget has been increased by 25 percent in comparison to last year. We are not the only ones in this, so to say, favorable position, other media in languages of ethnic minorities are in the same situation. However, I'm only talking about traditional media outlets, founded by the national councils.

When it comes to "Ruske slovo", PC it is financed by the state as part of the public interest and I'd say that more than 80 percent of the needs of "Ruske slovo" is financed from the provincial budget...I think that is the only solution and that media in the languages of ethnic minorities, "Ruske slovo" and other media in Ruthenian, to be precise, wouldn't be able to survive otherwise.

The funds received from the budget are sufficient for basic needs of the media in the languages of ethnic minorities, while additional funds are secured by running advertisements or commercials or through projects that are implemented occasionally.

The province is obliged to publish all its advertisements and public competitions in the languages of ethnic minorities, so we generate some income there. Also, on the territory of the city of Subotica, such things also need to be published in Croatian. What we're also involved in are various projects, be it cross-border projects, projects organized by the Central State Office for Croats Abroad or special-purpose projects. For example, the Ministry of the European Union and the Regional Development of Croatia organized a cross-border project.. Now we're waiting for an Erasmus project to be approved. We're also working on a joint project with the Agroclub agricultural portal... Such projects are very welcome, not necessarily because of finances, because, as I said, we can make the ends meet without those resources, but because of widening our readership and partners we are working with.

Commercial revenues, as well as realization of various projects, depend on the number of outlets and how numerous an ethnic minority group is, as well as on how connected it is with its home country, which is very specific when it comes to the Ruthenian or Roma community, since they have no home country.

When it comes to the Ruthenian community, it is not numerous, there are fewer media outlets and those like "Ruske slovo" don't have much space for commercial advertising... However, there is another way in which "Ruske slovo" can secure those 15 percent of its budget and that's through competition co-financing, sponsorships and donations. When it comes to donations, the situations has improved slightly... However, the funds generated in this way do not go directly to providing public information in the Ruthenian language, but they are used for publishing, since this is a news and publishing company.

The main reasons why the media in the languages of ethnic minorities do not participate in international media competitions are a lack of professional capacity, references or partners.

They also say that the conformism of a public company makes everything more difficult. On the other hand, the awareness that the funds from local, provincial and state budgets in Serbia are already intended for well-known beneficiaries discourages them from competing for that kind of aid.

Bearing in mind the prejudices regarding how it's all been decided before and since we don't want to waste our strength and energy and the fact that I know that some organizations applied with several projects at several competitions for state funds and were unsuccessful, we rely on those competitions that we can win. Our problem is the project team, the management that would do that, we don't have that capacity.

Pursuant to the Law on Public Service Broadcasting⁷, two public broadcasting companies are financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia and through commercial income. *Radio-televizija Vojvodine*, public broadcasting company, broadcasts programs in 15 languages of ethnic minority groups living on the territory of AP Vojvodina. The program in the Roma language was first broadcast in 1992, and the newsroom currently employs six people. Officially, they have no comments on potential differences in the professional status, as well in the salaries between different newsrooms at the provincial public broadcasting company.

It's not just the newsroom in the Roma language, all newsrooms in the languages of ethnic minorities are trying not to reveal their own dirty secrets. Also, the content of the program at RTV has become a political topic, since the company has made it clear that the first program, which is in Serbian, is more important than RTV 2.

When it comes to commercial or media reporting in languages of ethnic minorities, their financial stability depends on the power and investments of the home state, as well as on the impact of political structures on advertisers.

I only know how many ads there are in "Szabad Magyar Szo", and there aren't many, since advertisers are afraid to place their ads in the media not favored by SVM. The situation is similar all over the country when it comes to the influence of the ruling party on media and advertisers. Namely, even commercial advertisers here depend on some political deals and are, consequently, not allowed to advertise in free media.

There have been situations when some advertisers could not advertise in our outlet due to political reasons. For example, the companies using the funds of the "Prosperitati" Foundation should advertise in suitable media and were practically forbidden to place their ads in outlets like ours, since the money granted by Hungary through that foundation is later distributed according to the instructions from SVM. We have only one private advertiser, who is probably powerful and brave enough to advertise in our outlet. There are also a few smaller advertisers, who want to express their political attitude by advertising with us.

It's definitely limited, because we are not able to show some large numbers to advertisers, while smaller advertisers in the municipality of Bački Petrovac are very careful about choosing an outlet for advertising, taking into consideration any potential repercussions. And there would surely be repercussions, because apart from the pressures on the media, there is also pressure on

7 https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_javnim_medijskim_servisima.html Accessed on 25.11.2022.

companies. We have not had a concrete example in that sense, because we haven't tried to offer advertising space, but I know what happens to political activists from citizens' groups that were a very strong opposition at the latest local elections, since representatives of local authorities tried to make some of them jobless. Basically, if you're a professional, independent media outlet, I don't see a lot of room for commercial revenue from advertising.

Another problem related to local media competitions, according to our interviewees who report in languages of ethnic minorities, is the fact that the distribution of funds depends on the will of the ruling structures and on whether the political option ruling at the national level is dominant in relation to parties of ethnic minority groups. However, the situation is the same when it comes to project co-financing at the provincial or state level.

For example, at the local competition this year in Senta, the funds went to one company from Novi Sad, which I'd never heard of, and which was supposed to report from Senta... Before, when the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM) had a majority in the local council, the funds went to the outlets loyal to that party: "Magyar Szó", "Het Nap" and Panon TV. This year, the Progressive Party is more influential locally, so the beneficiaries were slightly different, since they too had to please their favorites.

We finance our activities mainly through projects. At the moment, there is an EED project, and another one with Office for Slovaks Abroad, but those amounts are not high. This year we've also received some funds from the Ministry of Culture and Information, but only because culture was all the rage, so they didn't have to consult the National Council of Slovaks, as they do when it comes to media projects, when the Council traditionally rejects our projects. Because of that practice, I haven't sent a single media project this year to national and provincial competitions.

Three years ago, we submitted a project for local co-financing in 27 municipalities where there are members of the Hungarian ethnic minority. Not a single competition approved our application. We also took part in national and provincial competitions and had some of the projects approved. That's kind of levelling off the playing field in the province. The Hungarian Council has a right to give their opinion at that level regarding the received project proposals and they usually decide to give a same amount to everyone and that's been the situation for years now. It doesn't matter whether you've submitted a good project or not, everyone gets something out of it.

I think that at local competitions the media that are professional and free stand no chance. They've even stopped applying for budget funds, because of the experience they've had, i.e. because they've never received anything. So, that system of financing doesn't work as it should. When it comes to "Autonomija" in Hungarian, we haven't even tried to compete locally, and we've never got anything from the province, only from the state.

The financial stability of commercial and community media that report in Serbian and respect professional and ethical standards is hard to achieve. Commercial revenues are minimal, and in case there is willingness among advertisers, we are talking about smaller communities, where those advertisers do not have significant resources at their disposal.

We've had situations where some advertisers thanked us for contacting them, but replied they were not able to work with us. Namely, the business environment in Sombor is catastrophic and appearing at the "SO.info" portal wouldn't improve their business, but quite the opposite

– it would make running it more difficult. There is almost no chance to cooperate with public companies and institutions.

We've received several offers from marketing agencies, but we never replied to those, because we knew on behalf of what clients they were contacting us and we've always been against publishing PR texts. It would be counterproductive to our image to have a NIS advertisement or a Rio Tinto advertisement. We believe our readers would not take kindly to something like that... So, we've willingly limited our options to conduct business on the market.

Occasionally, some advertisers want us to place their banner. Those are typically some civil society organizations, or enterprises, but mainly obscure ones. We don't have a conflict of interest or something like that. But even that happens rarely.

The funds available for financing media in local budgets are typically allocated to selected media, which are often not even located in the community in which they should, at least according to the idea of project financing, improve the quality public information.

The beneficiaries are those bot media. For example, over the past five years, there's been tabloids, such as "Informer", "Srpski Telegraf", "Srbija Danas", Studio B, then some outlet from Vojvodina, which appeared out of the blue and applied for the funds. There is also local 025.rs portal, which was created with an aim to overshadow Soinfo.rs and its founder was a local member of SNS. They have a lot of employees, but you never see any name in the impressum. They are favorites and they usually get the largest share of the funds at local competitions, around two to three million dinars.

Because we're recognized locally as critics of the public life, we doubt we would be in competition to be awarded those donations. Especially because I have an impression that the beneficiaries are known in advance. Those competitions are only for those invited to them, and they only appear to be public and open to all media outlets... After Novi Pazar, the city of Pančevo is the one that allocated most money for local media. This year, the budget was 40 million dinars. We've written about that several times. We know which media outlets would get the funds. Most money is given to TV Pančevo, that not many people watch. It used to be a very recognizable and influential local television, which received international awards, but that reputation has been in serious decline since 2015 and privatization... Some funds are also given to the infamous ePančevo website, a franchise of the famous media practitioner Aleksandar Čupić, who also owns websites eVršac and ePodunavlje. So, in the area where the real power lies, the only man that makes decisions about everything is the vice-chairman of the Executive Board of the Serbian Progressive Party, the Commissioner for South Banat and the Danube County Branko Malović. Other beneficiaries are some local sites, Facebook pages and projects that are either short-lived or established only for the purpose of money laundering.

The main reason why we've never applied for funds is that we've often analyzed the projects, beneficiaries, amounts received, reports on expenditure and written analytical texts about those topics. Therefore, we'd have a conflict of interests, so we've never done that... They have a well-developed communication network, which includes other cities as well. For example, Subotica gives money to someone from Belgrade, Sombor or Mali Iđoš and then someone from those cities gives money to someone else and it's all part of a plan and agreement and there is not much room from any projects that would be remotely serious. The approved projects have no connection with

researching the work of local self-governments, but are focused on reporting on the work of the local self-government, which I believe is a waste of time.

The interviewees testify about cases when they received funds, but were subsequently pressured to change the project title, because it was believed that the word “corruption” was problematic in the title.

When we were selected, when the competition results were announced, a campaign against me and our media started, so we decided from that moment on to have no partnership with the city of Sombor. We were suggested to remove the word “corruption” from the project title. We were excluded for two years. One year, we returned some insultingly low amount, I don’t know exactly how much, perhaps around 100,000 dinars. We had previously been awarded around 30,000 or 50,000 dinars on two occasions for projects that required ten times more money. And we didn’t use those funds. Practically, we only used those funds one year. We participate each year only in local competitions, because our newsroom capacity doesn’t allow us to deal with extra work related to provincial and national competitions.

Another problem is the untransparent work of the committees that decide on the allocation of funds and the fact that committee members are mainly unfamiliar to media professionals or close to political parties.

Those committees typically consist of representatives of some unknown media associations and less famous media. One year, they were from Srbobran, another from Kikinda. To me, they were completely anonymous, I’d never heard about any of them.

We have no idea who the members of those committees are. Some people just appear on behalf of some unknown associations, such as the Association of Tourist Journalists of Vojvodina or some other “phantom” association, completely unknown to anyone, including journalists. Also, the methodology applied to select proposals is very untransparent, there is no rulebook or evaluation criteria against which the committee members would assess projects, which would be the most objective method. That’s why I have my doubts that they even meet. It seems to me that they just receive ready-made solutions that they just need to sign and then the mayor ceremonially accepts their decision.

We didn’t agree with the way in which committee members were selected. One reason was that they were close to certain political parties and another that they were not professionals. For example, not a single project proposal from NDNV has ever been accepted, but they’ve always accepted a proposal from some obscure associations I had never heard of. When I asked around, I realized it was someone close to political parties.

Unfortunately, there is no control, nor do we know how those committees are established. In Senta we had some people from Zrenjanin, Kikinda... There were no journalists known locally.

What is also a problem, as the interviewed journalists claim, is the fact that proposals for committee members submitted by media associations have been ignored for years.

On the other hand, proposals for committee members sent by independent journalists’ and media associations are traditionally rejected, among other reasons because we would then have a

direct insight into the “technology” of this swindle. We don’t even know when the committee meets, nor what their deadlines are.

One year, I was nominated by NDNV for the local committee, but the proposal was rejected. You can usually find representatives of some odd media and journalists’ association that I’ve never heard of in my life there.

Since it is impossible or nearly impossible for them to access the project funds at local, provincial or national level, the media outlets that nurture professionalism apply for funds internationally, organize crowdfunding campaigns or use some other resourceful method, including volunteering.

We finance our work through project financing, foreign donations... We’ve had two or three crowdfunding campaigns when we had certain problems that we wanted to resolve, such as our website redesign, employing one more person...

I provide part of the funds as the owner and founder from a consulting agency, but that is a really small, insignificant part, for the time being. We’ve recently had a project approved by the British Council / Thomson foundation. Storyteller got the most points among 17 media outlets that applied for the funds. Our topic is ecology and we deal with it through a cooperation between media and an ecological organization.

Our strategy is to have a large number of associates, who write a text every ten days, so that they don’t feel abused, while we try to provide regularity and variety of content. This approach has resulted in over four thousand pieces published, written by over 700 authors, which is a large number for a city the size of Pančevo. We do that almost always without any fee. Naturally, we’d like to be paid adequately, but there are so many obstacles... There were some suggestions regarding crowdfunding campaigns and we had those. They can be successful periodically, but they require young people to get involved, because they have those “marketing-oriented” brains. It’s not for journalists from my generation. We’d also been thinking about introducing subscription, but we gave up on the idea, because we estimated we couldn’t find people who would be willing to accept additional regular expenses. Ever since the introduction of internet journalism, people have been used to getting content free of charge and it would be very difficult to change that now.

Regardless of whether the content is published in Serbian or any language of ethnic minority groups, especially when it comes to print editions, the circulation and readership are in decline, because the audience that relies to on traditional ways of receiving information is decreasing in number.

The first issue of “Csaladi Kor” was published in 1990 and was owned by a private company back then. Six years ago, the weekly was bought by the Freedom of the Press Foundation and it has been functioning as a community media outlet. The circulation has been halved. Why? The circulation is declining because our readers are elderly people. That’s the answer, because when they die, there are no new readers to replace them, because the young don’t read the press. We have periodical donations from private donors, but that is a very small share. We mostly rely on international donations and project financing. We’ve had four large projects: NED, EED, the Government of Switzerland and British Council.

4.2. Political pressures and safety of journalists

The results of the research show that journalists are most frequently exposed to verbal violence, i.e. they receive threats and insults through social networks or comments on their texts. Unfortunately, threatening messages are sometimes written near the place of residence of certain journalists.

Not as a journalist writing for “Ruske slovo”, but as a freelancer writing in both Serbian and Ukrainian and a BBC correspondent... It happens in conflict and post-conflict societies and it’s an unpleasant part of the job. Since the war in Ukraine broke out on 24th February this year, I’ve been receiving threats pretty regularly. They are mostly written as direct messages via Facebook. Some threats, however, come from my close environment. I had a letter “Z” written with a marker in the elevator in my building. The letter symbolizes Russian aggression on Ukraine and I think it was meant as a threat to me. It’s the same group of people, the same handwriting that used to draw swastikas and names of war criminals like Ratko Mladić.

There have been threats. A few years ago, we had a situation when we were threatened with slaughter because of some articles we’d written. The threat was sent as a comment, below the text. We didn’t publish the comment, but we did report it to the police and NDNV and other associations. There have also been situations when we were pressured not to run an article... I don’t have that fear or anything, but I did have a bad feeling for a week or so, when I felt as if I had been doing something wrong, while basically I was merely exposing facts and I had evidence for every claim I made.

I have not received any threats in the context of “Storyteller”, but I did get them while working at “Hlas”. I reported them to the police back then. They investigated, found the person who sent the threats and warned them. And it stopped. It was long ago. There was no trial. However, because of my work at “Storyteller”, I’ve been exposed to insults. Two years ago, during the local elections in Maglić and Gložan, I reported a large number of irregularities. The president of the municipal council sent me emails afterwards, in which he insulted me by calling my professional work ridiculous and stuff like that. Until then we’d had a very good relationship. Still, it never went any further, it ended as our internal communication.

I have received criticism on social networks, but I wouldn’t call it threats. As far as I know, there are no such safety threats in our Hungarian community, but there are political pressures, which are the foundation of everything. Especially in the media controlled by the National Council of Hungarians. Actually, I can’t call the way they operate pressure any more. They simply receive instructions on what they need to report on and how and those journalists just follow such instructions. “Magyar Szo” is a good example, since there is almost no one left there who refused to work like that. Around 10 journalists have lost their jobs because of censorship.

There have been all sorts of things going on. We’ve had calls from local important figures, following some questions we’d sent to the city institutions. Lately, there have been calls because of the protests, because I was announcing them... Why did I do that, why did I take part in them, why was I there?... My colleague and I were even accused of organizing protests against Rio Tinto and were called in for questioning. We received two minor offense charges, even though they knew we were journalist, for being at the rally. For a while, I was receiving anonymous calls daily at exactly 23.55 and that lasted for months. There’ve been no physical assaults, except being expelled

from that public event.

Apart from the aforementioned example of physically removing people from a press conference, representatives of local self-governments or party officials act more subtly by avoiding communication, i.e. ignoring unsuitable journalists and not inviting them to events.

We do not receive invitations to press conferences or other public events. And when I show up at one of those events, I am either expelled or not allowed in. My female colleagues fare a bit better, but they did have some unpleasant experience, especially when reporting on the events against migrants... We are absolutely discriminated against in communication with the local institutions. We communicate via e-mail only, so that there is a trace, at least.

When it comes to the city authorities and whether someone from the local self-government has ever called us, that has never happened. I feel they are afraid of us. On the one hand, they don't want any conflict with us. They want to have a, so to say, good relationship with us, since our cooperation was extremely bad two or three years ago. Now the authorities have been changed, even though those are still the same people, most of them... they are now more open to media, us included, which makes our job easier.

It's easier to find a collocutor from ministries, OECD and embassies, than among local officials. This year, however, they seem to have changed the attitude a bit. I wrote a text about waste management and the public utility company wouldn't return any of my calls. However, two weeks later, someone called and answered our questions. That shows you that everything depends on those individuals working at those institutions. We've had a problem with the National Council of Slovaks for years, they too wouldn't answer any questions... That is quite frustrating, since we always try to present a story from as many different angles as possible, but when you need to reach local authorities or the National Council, you find the door locked. I don't understand why they don't use that opportunity and media space to present their attitudes.

Our problem is that as independent journalists we can't count on the support of local institutions and we don't have any communication with them at all... Neither do journalists in Pančevo get together to express solidarity, nor do other public institutions make any statements regarding such problems. Such attacks are treated as "something normal". Journalists need to be provide support and protection as protectors of the public interest.

There are some honorable exceptions, but they generally don't communicate with professional media, they don't provide data, they don't make statements or give interviews, at least when it comes to media outlets in Hungarian. On the other hand, they have their own people, with strong political connections with a political party, working as editors at pro-regime media and that's "problem solved" for them. Media are managed by politicians and it's quite open and obvious, the cards are on the table, everyone knows what and how to do it.

The most commonly used "weapon" of the ruling party is ignoring. They don't answer our questions or invite us to press conferences, as if we didn't exist. Sometimes there are messages on social networks that do beyond criticism, especially if you write something about Victor Orban, but there are also fervent fans of Putin. So, there are all sorts of comments, even those bordering threats. Still, we've never reported them to the police, we haven't had such a serious case.

It is particularly worrying that other media outlets lead a campaign against journalists who report professionally and responsibly. Our interviewees explain that those are mainly the media that have been continuously receiving the funds within the scope of project financing.

Since I spoke critically about the local authorities and officials at the citizens' protests in February 2019, the very same evening TV Pančevo started a campaign against me, which was followed by subsequent campaigns in May and June that year... By the way, the minimal fines that courts impose after a trial that lasts three or four years range between EUR 100 and 150 per one insulting article, which sends a message to journalists not to get into it. On the other hand, that is also a message to predators that for EUR 100-150 they can publicly say whatever they want about whoever they want. Especially since they can pay such a fine from the funds they receive at public media competitions.

The interviewed media professionals believe that relevant institutions in the Republic of Serbia rarely really react in case of violence or threats sent to journalist.

Well, they don't react. I think they just make a note of it and that's where the story ends. There is no body that would take the attacks on journalists and threats seriously. I don't know if journalists should have the status of an official, whether that would be a solution and give us protection, but I see no progress in the sense that the police have solved a case that was important. I actually don't think it's the police that makes such decisions, but that it comes from the top state authority.

They don't react, although they are legally required to. I think we can see every day how they don't react.

They don't react and they are responsible for everything that has been happening to journalists and professional media. There were pressures during the previous regime, they too would sometimes refuse to answer questions and they too had their "teams of bots"... But the current authorities have taken it up a notch. The officials are openly showing their disgust, they have adjusted the system to suit their own needs, there is no reaction from the prosecutor's office. It seems like everyone has been blackmailed. That was not the case before, before 2012/13.

Generally speaking, there is a great deal of inertia when it comes to reaction from institutions. We can't doubt the independence of the courts, because we turn to them to protect our rights.

It's not safe, primarily for existential reasons. However, if we look at the big picture, we'll see that physical safety in Serbia is also in danger. My impression is that institutions react unwillingly and only when the incident is too serious to be ignored, but they don't do anything systematically.

I don't think so. There was a case when our colleague's house was burned down and it all became pointless at that moment. After all, when you ask a question as a journalist and instead of an answer you receive attack from the most powerful man in the country, I think it sends a clear message that you can, almost literally, wipe the floor with them. That sends a very clear picture to every local bully. So, I think that the attitude towards journalists needs to be changed, especially at press conferences, because it's our job to ask questions, even unpleasant ones. When people understand that, I think they'll also change their attitude towards journalists.

The lack of reaction on behalf relevant institutions, as well as the ironic/cynical attitude of the society towards the pressures and attacks on journalists, are also a reason why there is a dilemma whether to report threats at all. Some interviewees believe that journalists' associations are doing enough and reacting, but that they could also educate journalists better regarding how to react to threats.

Take my example, I don't know when I should report something. A lawyer would say, "when you feel you should". I don't know the consequences, when would someone at the Ministry of Interior say, "Your accusations are unfounded, why did you call us?" Or, "Why haven't you reported it sooner?" How can journalists feel that is the moment to react and how can they get protection? And how do you protect yourself from aggression in the society? When you use autocratic statements to awaken and ignite aggression towards media and journalist, mostly independent ones. Democratic superstates, such as the EU or some international organization, should get involved.

One of the suggestions for solving this problem is to establish a register of attacks on journalists.

So that we know what's going on, because we receive information as part of some general reports of local journalists' associations, Reporters Without Borders or Freedom House. I think we need at least some insight, at least into final court decisions in cases related to attacks on journalists and the accompanying comments and explanations. In the case of Brankica Stanković, the state is the one that likes having someone to protect from itself. To give an example, "Do you really need all that?" That's the message sent by the state.

There was a case of specific threat on the territory of the municipality of Kovin and the police and other relevant institutions were informed about it. Namely, funeral wreaths were left practically in front of the doorstep of an associate of the Pančevo SiTi portal.

On 20th September 2022, our colleague Slobodan Dukić went for a walk and found two withered funeral wreaths at the entrance of his estate in Šumarak, municipality of Kovin. At that time, he was working on a story about suspicious diplomas in Kovin and was asking around, which is why he started getting various signals that some protagonists of his story would not like it. We published to text as soon as the threat was noticed, because somebody obviously didn't want that text to appear and they were hoping we'd give up, but since we didn't, we sent a clear message that no threat would stop us. The police visited the scene the very same day, the wreaths were taken for forensic analysis, our contact point in charge of journalists' safety at the police station in Pančevo and the Higher Prosecutor's Office in Smederevo were all informed, the case was open. I have to say that the relevant institutions reacted promptly. And our colleague was talking the very same evening at a panel-talk on journalists' safety in Pančevo.

Our collocutors state that self-censorship is very prominent in media, partly because people are aware that their safety could be endangered, and partly because they are not ready to sacrifice their personal comfort. Journalists reporting in languages of ethnic minorities believe that in their case the problem is further aggravated because of even smaller number of options for alternative employment in the media industry.

I think journalists know really well what they should and what they shouldn't write and how

they should go about it. Whether it should be a glorifying praise or should we ask an irrelevant instead of a crucial questions, whether to report some concrete explanations and accusations that might come up at a press conference... Do you put it in your report, do you open with it or place it in paragraph five, failing to mention it in the headline or lead—in? There are already certain manipulations in the very approach to reporting news.

Self-censorship exists because we need to take care of the safety of the members of our newsroom. We monitor and note, but we don't make certain things public. We're trying to protect ourselves like that.

Yes, it is more prominent. Journalists working in the languages of ethnic minorities in Vojvodina don't have a lot of alternatives when it comes to employment, and their range of options is much narrower if they confront... That type of conformism of having a job at a state-owned media outlet also has its financial aspect, which has a very strong influence on the journalist from ethnic minority groups. While other journalists fight for not only better-paid jobs according to the capitalist model of employment, but also for personal integrity, there are those who are safely snug. They have full-time employment and they can look forward to retirement. Unfortunately, there is often a chasm between the two extremes.

I think self-censorship is currently dominant at the media controlled by the National Council. They don't need anyone from the outside to censor what they do, they have the editor-in-chief who tells them how to do their job, based on the instructions they receive from a political party. That's how they work. There have been cases when someone would occasionally refuse to work like that, but that's no longer the case. I think there are no more people who would stand up against that at those newsrooms. When you look at their news programs, you can see everything is a pattern. So, every front page would, for example, surely feature someone from SNS or SVM.

I wouldn't actually say that all journalists working at some media are actually practicing journalism. I think there is a lot of self-censorship. For years, I've had this feeling that journalism in ethnic minority languages, at least in my community, has been reduced to some pseudo-events and superficial reports. We never wonder, for example, how some event was financed. It all looks like some bulletin journalism... One of the reasons is probably that people feel snug, because they think, "I'll get my salary, one way or the other". That's something that has always irritated me, even back when I was working at "Hlas ljudu", I always tried to motivate people to take a more analytical and critical approach. Journalism in Slovakian didn't use to be like this, I don't know when that switch took place.

There is self-censorship, because we always try to present the work of the National Council in the best possible light, even though that's not really always the case, but we try to present the best possible results through the content we create, because we simply believe that we're still not such an integrated and strong community to be able to talk about problems.

I don't know, there are no direct messages, like "don't publish this" or "publish that", no... Instead, it's always "that wouldn't be good at this moment" or "perhaps we should postpone running this story in the context of a bigger picture". Then we assess the situation, sometimes we might want to publish some information, some text, but we look at the big picture, whether it's a sensitive moment for the Croats here, whether it would have some negative implication on some bigger picture. So, we're trying to balance between some interests.

4.2.1. Discrimination

When it comes to journalists from ethnic minority communities, our collocutors do not mention cases of explicit discrimination at workplace in comparison to their colleagues who report in Serbian. However, the research shows that they sometimes get ignored, which contributes to the lack of visibility of minority communities in the society.

The media in languages of ethnic minorities are somewhat specific, because we, ethnic minorities, are invisible to them in both print and electronic media, we don't exist. I'm not talking only about the Croats, but about any ethnic minority. Some media do cover some events... We had a celebration of the day of our ethnic minority in Petrovaradin and the Provincial Secretary of Culture Dragana Milošević attended the event, which made it newsworthy. If we had celebrated without Dragana Milošević, nobody would have published the story. Or, I don't know, there is an incident involving Ruthenians, I'm just using them to illustrate the point... Every media will publish that. So, ethnic minority media are invisible to ethnic majority media. Our role, therefore, is to record all those things that ethnic majority media don't.

There exists a slightly segregationist attitude among some journalists that journalism in the languages of ethnic minorities is "minority journalism". It's like a stigma that all ethnic minorities have been marked with – "a member of minority". This attitude resembles one of the caste system in terms of intellect, as opposed to other minorities, such as political and cultural. It creates a ghettoized system of ethnic minorities, which everyone in the society is responsible for. Such an approach undermines professional self-confidence, because it nurtures the idea that journalism in the languages of ethnic minorities is "less valuable".

I find the program prepared by the Roma newsroom similar to programs of all other ethnic minority newsrooms. It is overshadowed by the program in Serbian, although the foundation of RTV is actually on the third floor, where all newsrooms in ethnic minority languages are. Without them, RTV wouldn't exist.

The communication with media in minority languages is mostly informal. Fifteen years ago the "Pančevac" daily had a much better with the media in minority languages. Unfortunately, the same situation is among the media in minority languages themselves. Members of the Progressive Party control almost all national councils, except the Hungarian one, because there is no need for that. So, everything is under control there. I get an impression that everything is numb and that there is no vitality in journalism in Pančevo, everything is colorless, devoid of ideas.

Our collocutors also say that, in general, our society shows interest in ethnic minority communities only when there is some incident or conflict.

They come, visit "Ruske slovo" in Novi Sad because they had been involved in some project, they do their story and leave. There is no active interaction. As Vladimira Dorčova Valtnerova nicely put it in her interview for FoNet, "ethnic minority communities are interesting only when it comes to incidents". However, I have no expectations in that respect, I don't think that's either good or bad.

The interviewed journalists agree that ethnic minority communities are treated differently, or even discriminated against, but most of them say they themselves have not experienced that.

Let me put it like this, a lot of people know I like telling jokes about Gypsies, so I first create an atmosphere where people can make jokes at my expense too and I've never felt that any of my colleagues or people in general was discriminating against me. I did think about it and I know who might do something like that, but I personally have never experienced it.

I guess that if "Hrvatska riječ" writes something, people interpret it differently than if the same thing has been published by, I don't, "Danas". Everybody would say, "What are they talking about?", so we might be under some kind of double pressure. I guess everything is read and there is press clipping and everything we write and publish is read and monitored.

The attitude of the media in Serbian, as well as the fact that the majority generally ignores the minorities, leads to auto-ghettoization of minority communities.

Yes, that's something that has been accepted as a norm, to be brutally honest, a minority has accepted it is a minority and it is not doing enough to change that, while the majority is less interested, because it believes that a minority is less important. For example, during my employment as a BBC correspondent, I cooperated with "Ruske slovo", so I could see that difference between appearing somewhere as a BBC journalist and a journalist from an ethnic minority media outlet. There is a world of difference that you can feel, but you can also feel the inferiority complex that ethnic minorities themselves create and you can feel the mistrust between the two worlds. Actually, this is nothing but a lack of civil society in Serbia. Vojvodina has enjoyed mutated multiculturalism for a while now. We should work on creating a better society, on cultural exchange, civil values. Interculturalism is now present only due to enthusiasm of individuals, not because of tradition or cultural practice.

4.2.2. Attitude towards women journalists

Both men and women journalists are exposed to violence and threats to their safety while doing their job. However, gender-based violence and sexual harassment are disproportionately higher when it comes to women journalists, both at the workplace and on the Internet, it is stated in the Report⁸ on Violence towards Women Journalists by UN's special investigator (2020). It is also stated that women journalists are expected to fulfil the stereotypical roles and sexualized images of women and to work in the conditions of unequal power distribution between men and women in the world of media. Furthermore, apart from open harassing that women journalists and media practitioners are exposed to, there are outside factors in some countries, such as non-flexible working hours, limited access or lack of access to quality childcare at affordable prices, inadequate policy regarding parents' leaves and negative social attitudes.

Even though women journalists in Serbia who perform their tasks professionally have been quite vocal lately regarding the defense of public interest and human rights in general, which led to them being verbally abused and exposed to misogyny, sexism and insults, most of our interviewees believe that the position of women in journalism is not different to that of men. On the other hand, the interviewees claim that gender inequality is rather prominent in the society.

⁸ Report on violence against women journalists by the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls. Downloaded on December 2, 2022 from <https://www.rodnarodnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2020-07/izvestaj%20specijalne%20izvestiteljke%20o%20suzbijanju%20nasilja%20prema%20novinarkama%20jul%202020.pdf>

Just like there is discrimination in the society, there is probably also discrimination in media, but I can't single out anything, because I don't have any relevant data, nor do I know that some of my colleagues have had such problems. I don't know that female colleagues are paid less. When it comes to editors, there are women editors. "Magyar Szo" is managed by a woman, "Panon" has a woman editor of the radio station...

There are women editors and journalists and we think there is no difference between the position of women and men in our newsrooms. There are six of us and men and women are equally represented...

I don't have any experience regarding smaller salaries. Wherever I worked, there was no difference of that kind. On the other hand, it is a well-known fact that the salaries in the newsrooms of ethnic minorities at the public broadcasting company are smaller than those in the Serbian newsroom, but that applies to everyone, not just women... It has happened that I come across a sexist attitude while doing an interview, but I think I'm a strong woman, so I pay no attention, although it does annoy me. That's my experience. I think there is a general attitude in our society that women journalists should deal with culture and not, for example, with local elections. That patriarchal attitude has been imposed on the whole society, at all levels and journalism is no exception. I've had questions from people very close to me, such as "Why did you go to Croatia, Hungary, or anywhere on business?" They thought my place was at home, in the kitchen...

We have several women journalists. I see no discrimination in our circle. On the contrary, our site is openly feminist and we often publish feminist content. We find it normal. Still, I haven't noticed that was a prominent in other outlets either.

Well, there is a difference, women are privileged in our company. There are three of them and two of us men. I'm kidding, of course, I think all newsrooms are trying to establish that gender balance. Now, when it comes to RT Vojvodina, I don't know much about the difference between men and women journalists... How should I put it, we're still living in a patriarchal society, where we sort of talk about how we fight for women's rights. In reality, though, the leading and high positions are occupied by men who have a very good rhetoric.

The quoted attitudes are similar to the findings from previous research "Even though they claim they have never experienced discrimination for being women, most women members of the focus group agree that women journalists are in a more difficult position than their male colleagues."

4.3. Professional work

The attitude of local institutions and how they ignore media that report in accordance with ethical and journalistic codes and that are not under influence of political and economic power structures makes it more difficult for journalists to work professionally. Journalism has become a precarious profession, job positions are insecure, journalists receive very low salaries and are often forced to do several jobs in order to secure the basic necessities. On the other hand, the experience shared by our interviewees shows that even a more stable socio-economic status and financial stability do not guarantee that professional standards would be respected.

Quite the opposite. I'd say that those journalists with insecure jobs such as mine and who don't know whether they would find a donor to make it to the next year are those who are doing the right things that a journalist should do. The report professionally, while those that have all that money are instructed simply not to do that, to avoid writing about some things and they accept such deals. I don't think they do it because they are afraid, I think they don't want anything better, they are fine with how things stand. I guess they don't see anything wrong in it, because if they did, they wouldn't be journalists.

When it comes to the media founded by the Councils of National Minorities, as some interviewees point out, there is certain public company conformism, which limits professional as well as the democratic potential of those media and, consequently, the whole society.

That is the curse of public ownership where there is still this motto, "Why would I take sides, why would I now write about some privatization and have problems with local people in power? We'll wait for the media with national coverage to do that, and then we might jump the bandwagon. Why would we poke powerful people in the eye, when our salaries don't depend on it anyway?"

The journalists exposed to threats and verbal abuse in smaller communities do not enjoy support from their colleagues from local pro-regime media, or, as they put it, there is a complete lack of mutual support and solidarity.

We don't have true colleagues locally. The only people we turn to are NDNV and NUNS, because we know and trust those people and that's our only option. I saw it for myself when they expelled me from a press conference, everybody was there and nobody tried to prevent it from happening. Citizens trust us, because they know we've not published fake news or made-up stories for 20 years. They say hi, often give a look of approval, a few words of encouragement or "pat us on the shoulder".

I think it was quite different ten years ago. Now, journalists don't even think whether there will be any solidarity if they leave the boundaries of propaganda, but rather stick to their propaganda work.

There are certain specific features of working at local media outlets in smaller communities, since people know each other better and communicate to each other more, which means those journalists are more exposed to pressure or negative reactions.

It used to be much easier to get an answer to a question, but that's no longer the case and there is a greater exposure to pressure. We can notice that many media practitioners are more than willing to be spokespersons for various actors who don't look kindly at free journalism. Nobody can destroy our profession from the outside, only we from the inside can do it. Unfortunately, many of our colleagues have turned out to be susceptible to this kind of agreement, cooperation or pact, void of any principles. That is even more prominent at the local level, because such "deals" are easier to reach. We, living in a small community, easily recognize which media is independent, despite all the problems associated with it, just like we can easily recognize those who spread nothing but propaganda of the local, provincial or central authorities.

What might be more specific is the fact that we all know each other and that, for example, if

I or my colleague appear at an event, there is a reaction of those participants. There are sometimes difficult encounters or avoidances when it comes to the people from our stories. Sometimes they “point a finger” at a journalist or we’re simply not welcome at public events, and that’s probably why we don’t get invited. It is worrying that there is no solidarity among local “colleagues” and that most local media outlets would be out of business were it not for the money from the public media competition. We’ve received information that the SOinfo.org address has been blocked on the local self-government’s network.

I really don’t feel indifferent when I meet some people in this small community, some politicians or officials... I don’t think they will physically attack me, but I know what power they hold and that any critical word my media may write about them... they can see it as a provocation... Perhaps it’s more difficult to always remain professional, because this is a small community, we all know each other and it’s really difficult when you realize that you actually know all those people you’re supposed to write about. I see that the circle of my friends has really shrunk over the years, which I find quite sad.

The problem regarding the functioning and independent work of media in languages of ethnic minorities is that they are under double pressure, which can come from representatives of national authorities, but also those in charge of the national councils of national minorities.

I was replaced as the editor-in-chief of “Magyar Szo” 11 years ago, probably because the party didn’t like me. The explanation we received from the National Council regarding my removal from the post was rather confusing, so much that I couldn’t interpret it now. Of course, the act of replacing me was preceded by pressures and various requests mainly at the level of the Managing Board of “Magyar Szo”. I didn’t receive any direct calls from SVM, because they knew they would get an answer that they wouldn’t like. So, they used a different approach, though the Managing Board, but that failed as well, so they found another way to remove me from the post.

The National Council is our founder and every founder wants to exercise its rights by influencing the content of the newspaper, right? That is our constant and permanent struggle to remain true to ourselves, to our profession and be proud of our texts. So, they somehow accept they are our founders, but that we’re not some kind of news bulletin or their organ, but a professional media outlet. So, we struggle constantly, but, as I say, this could be a situation where we really need to fight for our professional standards.

“Hlas ljudu” is currently completely under control of the National Council, which doesn’t let them breathe. They have lists of people who must not appear in the newspaper, neither with their name and surname, nor as a mere reference. Alternatively, if a text containing some of the names is sent to the editor, he simply removes them. That is truly horrible, but the journalists have accepted it, they’re not complaining.

In order to provide additional protection to professional integrity, as well as independent and autonomous functioning of journalists who report in the languages of ethnic minorities, certain outlets, aided by media experts, have adopted their internal codes of ethics. The first self-regulatory act of that kind, in cooperation with the Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) and the OSCE mission to Serbia, was adopted by the Ruthenians, so the “Ruske slovo” news and publishing company was the first media outlet in the Republic of Serbia to adopt an internal code of ethics.

In 2018, when the Media strategy was being drafted in Serbia, we asked for a tri-party system of managing boards in situations where the founders are the state and the national council. Three members would be recommended by the news-publishing institutions, three by the national council and three by the community. Such proposal was rejected and it was most fervently opposed by the representatives of the Hungarian community. The National Councils didn't want to give away the power to control media, which is why our proposal was rejected, unlike self-regulation, which found its place in the Media strategy. So, we created, in cooperation with NDNV and OSCE, in 2018 our internal code of ethics for journalists. In 2019, the Ruthenian community, i.e. "Ruske slovo" and the National Council of the Ruthenians (its board in charge of information) were the first to adopt such self-regulatory agreement between a media outlet and its founder. The code referred to the two outlets operating within the institution, the "Ruske slovo" daily and Rutenpres, a daily agency and online media outlet.

One of the key reasons for adopting the internal code of ethics is the need to lower the influence of the National Council on the newsroom and HR policy of the outlet.

A less serious problem was application of professional standards, a more serious one was related to HR policy at the newsroom and the institution, because any public institution in Serbia, especially one in charge of information, is exclusively reserved for a political party as its loot. There was a real war about some people and their appointments. Last year, "Ruske slovo" has a situation where the wife of the president of the National Council of the Ruthenians was elected the editor-in-chief of the "Ruske slovo" weekly. That prompted an immediate reaction of the Court of Honor of NDNV, which said that "the autonomy of "Ruske slovo" was endangered". That caused permanent instability at "Ruske slovo", which can still be felt. On the other hand, that difference in the understanding and interpreting the Code and profession is actually a test of stability of the institution and us as professionals.

However, what remains a problem is the insufficient understanding among those employed at media outlets of the importance and function of an internal code of ethics.

It's a completely different story whether those working at those newsrooms and institutions are aware of the importance, responsibility and influence that they gain with the Code. There was even some criticism from the Managing Board of "Ruske slovo" that the company was going back to a new phase of self-management. Honestly, even though that criticism was given ironically at a session of the MB, I see nothing wrong in self-management, although we prefer to call it "autonomy", like the one enjoyed by scientific institutes and universities, which are independent from the state... I think that the general atmosphere in Serbia, the decline in media freedom and degradation of democratic institutions all influence the freedom of expression at "Ruske slovo". There is this self-censorship, where you don't want to tread on somebody's toes, especially in communities where everybody knows everybody. There is also the existential fear of losing employment, which is present in all public institutions in Serbia.

Following "Ruske slovo", an internal code of ethics was also adopted, in cooperation with the Press Council and OSCE mission, by the newsroom of a bilingual (Slovakian and Serbia) portal Storyteller. The key difference is that this is an outlet that reports in an ethnic minority language, but does not operate under the auspices of the National Council.

There is a code of ethics for journalists, but each media outlet has some specific traits. I

thought we should define some kind of mechanism and direction in which we were going and where we were, and that's why it was important for me to create this internal code of ethics of good journalist practice for the Storyteller portal... It was drafted during September and October 2022, as an internal act of self-regulation and I always had the code of "Ruske slovo" as an example in my head, because my decision to introduce such an act dates back to the time when we jointly started working on regulating the relationships between media in minority languages and the National Councils... And since we don't have a problem with our founder, I thought that everyone who cooperates with our newsroom needs to know what kind of outlet they are cooperating with... There is also a segment dedicated to our liabilities.... Our basic liabilities were not copied from the Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics, but were created to me motivate our associates. We cherish creativity and innovativeness. For example, we pay special attention to human and minority rights.

Although focused on the newsroom, a segment of this internal act is available on the outlet's website, to remind the citizens about the function of a media outlet, with an idea to activate the local community, as well, which has been passivized for the past several years.

Those who follow our work are active, but that's not a large community. This year, we have been very active outdoors, we're meeting with our community, and that's something our newsroom had been missing. It's a completely different situation now, we've been receiving reactions and information. This two-way communication seems to be waking up the newsroom, because we might have been neglecting the local community. Now we've turned the tables, started locally instead of covering the whole Vojvodina and some circles have started growing as a consequence.

4.3.1. Job satisfaction

Regardless of financial difficulties, pressures and threats, all journalists who took part in this research are generally satisfied with the job they have, they believe in the important role journalism should have in a democratic society and they are not considering a career change.

This is a job I like, the job I fell in love with when I was young... I love the camera, too, I love being able to send a message through media. I'm happy with my job.

That's the job I love, journalism has a mission, I still believe that. Free journalism is the key lever in the process of democratization. A journalist should control the authorities on behalf of all citizens.

I'm satisfied because I do what I love. Even when there are problems and challenges, I try to solve them. I'm actually more than satisfied, because I live journalism. There have been times when I was frustrated, asking myself what I was doing... It's been a while since I last felt like that.

Personally, I love it and I live journalism. Now, everything else... I can say I'm pretty dissatisfied. We have limited opportunities to do our job unobstructed, free, with dignity...

I can't image doing anything else, since I used to simultaneously do some jobs that have nothing to do with journalism, and it didn't last long. That's how I realized that journalism had been the only thing I'd been coming back to, no matter what I had been doing and then I made the decision to work in journalism, no matter how much money I earned and it's been like that ever since.

Personally, I'm very satisfied and I love my job. Professionally, I might be less satisfied because I think the news industry, not only in Serbia, but in the whole world too, is in a rather chaotic moment and I can't say I'm satisfied with how it works and what my place, as a journalist and as a director, is in this sphere.

I'm satisfied because there are still those challenges that motivate and keep us journalists attached to this job... Particularly challenging are outlets in minority languages... Also, we have, and that's pretty rare among media outlets now, stable sources of financing, so we can meet all the expectations of a professional newsroom. So, we're still that old-fashioned newsroom, with a proofreader, a prepress designer, a professional photographer and everything that newsrooms used to have, but what, to the best of my knowledge, doesn't really exist in print media. So, I'd say that one advantage our organization has over others.

I'm satisfied with this job, because I've wanted to be a journalist since I was a child. My parents were journalist, my sister is a journalist. So, I've been spending time at the Pančevac office since childhood and I've always enjoyed the atmosphere here... I'm talking about the 1970s... On the other hand, I like the job because it allows me to communicate with the public and because it is a righteous job.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of these interviews shows that there is no unique attitude regarding how the media sphere could be improved, but basically all recommendations are about changes that have to start from the bottom, from professionals and experts, from journalists. For instance, some collocutors believe it is necessary for journalists to **join forces in their struggle for the freedom of information**, because they are primarily to blame for the current situation, although some are not optimistic regarding such key changes, because, as they say, *“it's been like this for twenty or thirty years, I doubt anything dramatic would happen now”*.

It is not just the state that runs media outlets, but the outlets themselves are like that. Even if there are individuals who speak about it publicly, trying to draw attention to it, we're talking about a very small number of journalists and there is no unity behind it.

Where to start from? We don't need to start from anywhere, but simply go back to square one. Take TV Vojvodina for example, it used to be a great media outlet and so was the radio. If only we could go back to doing our job normally. If I knew how to paint houses, I would paint houses, but since I don't, I don't interfere with the job of those who come to my home to paint. Surely, they could do it the way I'd like them to, but is it a good way, that is the question.

One interviewee sees a possible solution in **cooperation with colleagues who share the same professional standards**, establishing a network of friendly media and communication with respective communities.

Continue applying for projects that make sense, that don't limit the freedom of thought, create content that is more analytical, scratch under the surface a bit, don't just hold the mic or recorder and report on what the local authorities are doing. Do what a journalist should do. I'd say

we're lucky that we don't have competitors, we have a wide field to cover and can write about all those topics that our colleagues are silent about, so I don't have to worry that someone will publish a scoop before me.

Since there is no cooperation between various social factors necessary for true improvement of media freedoms and quality of information, one of the solutions at the microlevel is **internal self-regulation**.

More participants need to participate in the process of changing the situation in journalism. We need the state, the NGO sector, media and external experts, academic community and faculties. Only if all of them collaborate can we actually do something. However, looking at the cards that have been dealt, there is no chance any change will happen. In some developed countries it would be normal for all those stakeholders to work together and put pressure on the state, supported by the public. On the other hand, I know where we live and that's why I'm pessimistic. However, I'm at the same time optimistic, because I think that little by little, at least at the microlevel, we can change some things and some newsroom policies and formalize some visions and that's one of the things that internal self-regulation is for.

On the other hand, there is an attitude that the situation in the society is so bad that we can question the effect of internal codes of ethics.

I don't know about the experience of others, i.e. how applicable such documents are when the wider political framework is so bad. There are no such documents in the Hungarian community.

The recommendations are directed towards both the state and relevant institutions, with an aim to **change the model of using local budgets to finance media outlets and to redefine the tax policy**.

I think the main problem is who is in those committees, because those who are there now have very little to do with journalism. The state could support free media more efficiently and I have two suggestions. If there is will, they could lower or waive taxes for print media, which are in a very difficult position. The second suggestion is to lower the rate of taxes and benefits for journalist, primarily associates. There are many solutions in various countries around the world and they could be applied in our case, too. We have around 25 external associates.

When it comes to information in the languages of ethnic minorities, our interviewees believe that it is necessary to define a new, **information strategy for minorities**.

After all, we have a new media strategy at the national level. Whether it is adopted depends on the National Councils, but there should definitely be a public debate about it. The ethical standards at various newsrooms are actually, in my opinion, the most problematic.

One of the possible solutions mentioned is **decentralization of the media scene and engaging young people** and making them interested in establishing professional standards, primarily those working at local media outlets.

It turns out that the same people have been saying the same things for the past 30 years and that they are the only ones who find the situation unacceptable. The answer lies in motivating

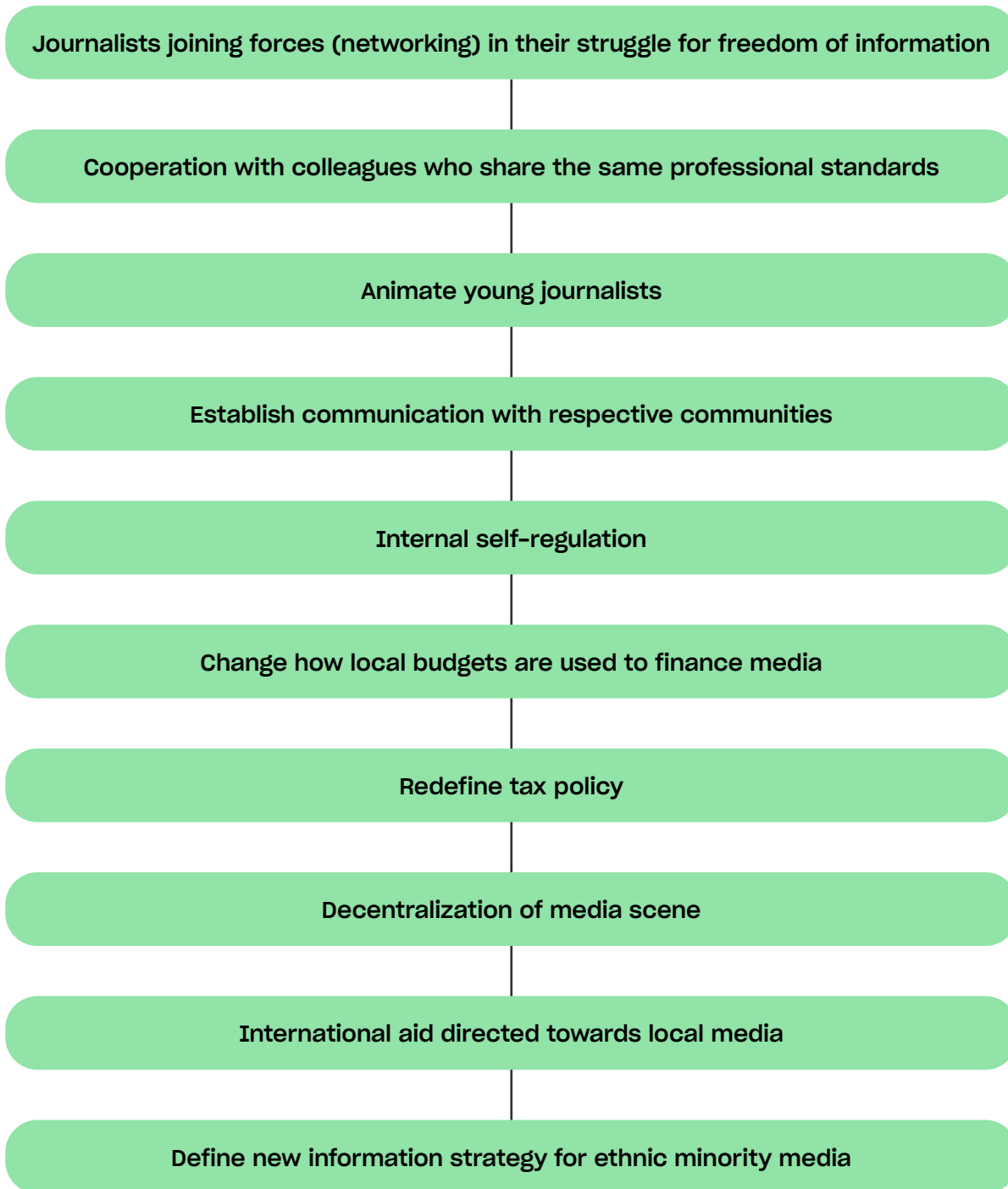
young people to take over and radically shake the things. But how can you do that, when they're not interested? At our school of journalism we saw those interested in it leave for Belgrade or start their careers in PR, marketing, as news presenters... There are very few of those who stay in Pančevo and see their future in local media. And that's a big problem. The worse local journalism is, the worse the local community is.

International aid directed towards local media is also necessary, since that is where the changes in the 1990s started.

Now all those independent media have been reduced to a handful of outlets and there is no network of local, independent media, where journalists would work and see each other. There are still brave people, we would open various topics, local stories and that would start changing everything, even the attitude of local authorities towards the public, towards journalists. But I don't think it's going to be easy, simple or fast. The community of journalists needs to start acting, but we know it didn't just happen in the 1990s, there was financial aid and support from abroad, equipment was sent, I know that was the case with Radio Sombor. We had various trainings, there was some kind of stimulus.

Vojvodina is completely discriminated when it comes to the distribution of international aid to media outlets, since most money is sent to the so-called Serbia proper, especially to Novi Pazar, Preševo and Bujanovac. However, professional media in Vojvodina most certainly need various types of aid, as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF INFORMATION AND ACHIEVING MEDIA FREEDOMS





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