

Statement No. 9/2013 on the Situation in HRT and the Radman Affair

The status of media freedom is a major theme and even greater problem for post-communist societies. The transition to democracy has been shown to be a complicated and thorny path, and these societies vividly reflect it. But in Croatia it is best seen in the attitude to public television.

All governments, from the founding of the Croatian state until today, have tried in various ways to gain influence over the management of television, but especially its program content. In this effort they did not hesitate to wrap their encroachments as a kind of gift-wrapped democratization, so we were at one time witnesses to what was in essence the fictional influence of civil society on the management of public television and its program content.

From its foundation until today, the Croatian Helsinki Committee (HHO) has monitored the situation in public television, dedicating itself primarily to ensuring that representatives of civil society manage it through the Program Council of HRT. With the arrival of a new, leftist coalition government in 2011, the masks have been taken off, and the Croatian Sabor, unfortunately with the support of associations of an (un)civil society, also including the Croatian Journalists' Association, has worked to revoke the authority of the Program Council of HRT, the main body for managing television and electing its managers and editors. With the announcement of the newest, eleventh consecutive Law on HRT, which in journalistic circles has ironically been called "Lex Lukashenko," the new government "supported" HRT. But from that moment, the Sabor now directly elects the director of national television and radio!

The head of HRT, in accordance with the well-remembered communist-bolshevik mentality, has been given absolute authority in naming editors, without the obligation to respect the opinion of the journalistic profession! Croatia has thus become the only country in post-communist Europe in which so-called nongovernmental organizations and a large part of civil society have shown their uncivil character, working hard to have representatives of civil society seated on the Program Council of HRT, as an ornament of "democracy," but of course, without any kind of influence on the work of the board of HRT. The authority to name directors and editors was taken away from the council, and today it has an almost folkloric character because the responsibility for selecting directors, and through them, all editors, has been ceded to the ruling party and its majority coalition in the Sabor. HHO organized a roundtable against this law that was boycotted by the representatives of (un)civil society, including representatives of the journalists' association, in whose building the gathering was held. The attitude of HHO is apparent from our Statement No. 7, which is attached.

It is a public secret that the law itself, about which many media outlets have written, was initiated by the President of the Republic of Croatia, Ivo Josipović, without constitutional authority, together with representatives of "(un)civil society," who define themselves as nongovernmental. It was known for months in advance that the law was to be changed in a way to protect the "person and work" of President Josipović, and Goran Radman was identified as the person to carry this out.

Radman himself, during the twilight of communism at the end of the 1990s, was the last director of the former Television Zagreb. With the fall of communism, Radman had to leave his position as director since he symbolized someone who was at the head of a medium that, in accordance of the non-democratic standards of the time, acted against free speech. The fact that a person who in the 1990s performed senior functions in the communist party system and who was appointed to a leadership position in the Television Zagreb has now been chosen as head of HRT in a multi-party democratic society itself represents a unique negation of the historical truth about the totalitarianism of the communist regime of that time.

It should be mentioned that prior to the current changes of the law members of the so-called leftist, often aggressive and intolerant, group of journalists in HTV made a pilgrimage to the Office of the President of the Republic, but also to the government (to Deputy Prime Minister Milanka Opačić). The most prominent among the "dissatisfied ones" was Sanja Miklaušević Pavić, who was at the same time and still is the head of the Council for Media (Presserat), whose basic task in the democratic world is to fight against political influence

on the media. The meetings with the president and the deputy prime minister were organized by Branko Vukšić, president of the Sabor's committee for information and media. All of this speaks to the real character of "changes" at HRT.

Immediately after the adoption of the law, the "temporary" leadership began a purely political purge of unacceptable individuals in a manner similar to that in 2000, when a left-liberal coalition came to power, and similar to the 1990s, during the HDZ supremacy. The "dissatisfied pilgrims" to the presidential palace and to the government were appointed to key positions in HRT.

The media "skills" quickly became evident. We quickly witnessed the decline in viewership in the so-called public television, and just to show that there is no end to the stupidity, Goran Radman, the chief director, has stated that he is not interested in viewership. The relevant data are more than a little worrying, not only for the leadership of television, its employees, and its subscribers, who each month have to pay their money for barely watchable programs. In only one year the viewership of HTV has drastically declined, from first place to third place!

According to data available to HHO, the viewership of television programming today is: Nova TV 30%, RTL 28%, HTV1 12%, HTV2 9%, HTV3 1%, and HTV4 with a few negligible decimals. Also, according to data for May of this year, the viewing figures for the television news, the most important informational-political broadcast is: Nova TV - 15%, RTL - 10%, HTV - 4.6%. Thus, the viewership of the television news has been cut in half in a year. In order to prevent the truth from coming out about the steep decline in HTV's viewership, the appointed director Radman acted in accordance with the well-known saying, "stop Reuters," repeating the logic and arrogance of a communist leader, who, having heard that the world's leading news agency was going to publish some uncomplimentary news about the former Yugoslav regime, simply, ignorantly, and in an uncivilized way exclaimed, "Stop Reuters!" That is how Radman halted the monitoring of viewership of television programming, which was conducted for HTV by the well-known company AGB Nielsen. At the same time, following his private personnel policy, he promoted one of the people most responsible for the decline in viewership, Zoran Šprajc, who is also known for his statement that he wants "television with an attitude," which is contrary to all of the fundamental precepts for information on public television, to be the chief of information programming for all of HTV.

In addition to his evident bungling leadership of the most important media company for the Croatian public, Radman displayed his arrogance by first refusing to submit a property and asset statement. After the Commission for Conflicts of Interest, chastised him for refusing to complete statement, he submitted one, but, as was subsequently shown, it was incomplete. He concealed that he is the owner of the **Vila Park Hotel on Lake Bohinj in Slovenia**. This elite vacation facility was once owned by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, and was intended for communist big shots of the time. In 2003, Radman bought the hotel for 650,000 euros in a direct deal, without a competition, with the participation of some prominent politicians who today are sitting in key positions in the institutions of the Republic of Croatia, representing the Social Democratic Party of Croatia, the legal, political, and moral successor of the League of Communists of Croatia.

After the media uncovered the scandal, Radman called a press conference for journalists who cover HRT. At that conference he called the journalists "promoters of evil" whose writing are endangering his life and the lives of his family, after which the journalists demonstratively walked out of the press conference. But Radman did not stop there. In front of a journalist who remained in the room he stated that he has yet more property that he did not register with the Commission for Conflicts of Interest.

The Supervisory Board of HRT, because of everything that is happening with Radman and around him, by a vote of three in favor and one abstention, called for the Sabor to fire Goran Radman from his position as the director of HRT for the following reasons:

1. failure to complete a property statement in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Croatia;
2. meddling in the program-editorial content in HRT;
3. appearance at a press conference in which he called the journalists the promoters of evil;
4. a sexist outburst toward a female colleague in HRT;
5. a justified suspicion of the correctness of naming the heads of individual business units;
6. removing from a closed session of the Supervisory Council the head secretary and notetaker (so that there would be no minutes of the meeting).

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CROATIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (CHC)



The Executive Committee of the Croatian Helsinki Committee supports the initiative of the Supervisory Board of HRT to replace Goran Radman as director of HRT. From the substance of our statement it is clear why we are calling for Radman's departure, but at the same time we are also opposed to the political practice of interfering in the work of institutions such as public television.

The committee thinks that such a step is possible only by changing the laws by which would be returned to HRT, as public television, and a public service to citizens, management of the selection of the director and editor, so that the Program Council of HRT regains its previous rights and responsibilities. It is possible to abolish government, or in terms of Croatian political relationships, party television, only so television is managed by representatives of the profession and civil society, and that recidivists of the communist era and mentality contained, among other things, in the term that modern political science calls an uncivil society.

For the Croatian Helsinki Committee

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President