

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Neither allies nor adversaries:

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This research report is based on a study conducted by Mediacentar Sarajevo, as part of regional study lead by the Albanian Media Institute. It explores the patterns of mutual relations between media and civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, within a methodological framework involving secondary research, small-scale survey (eleven respondents), interviews (three in-depth and two short interviews), as well as analysis of media content (analysis of 14 days of media reporting of three major print and three major online media outlets)¹. The content analysis provided insights into the frequency and patterns of media reporting on civil society, while the survey and interviews were aimed at exploring the perception of individuals from the sectors, media and civil society, about each other and their mutual relations. Before the results of primary research are presented, the report will first provide a short introduction about the media and civil society in the country.

Short overview of the media sector

The global indicators of media freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina had shown a steady growth for years in the post-war country. The solid legislative, regulatory and institutional framework that was developed sought to assure media freedom and respect for professional norms. Among other things, media content was for

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The analyzed dates were selected based on a stratified random sampling over a period of two months, given that we attempted to capture the patterns of regular reporting. In this period, also few dates which hold particular relevance for the civil society are selected – i.e. 16 and 17 May, days of the fight against homophobia. The selected days are: 28 and 29 April, 7 and 8 May, 16 and 17 May, 25 and 26 May, 3 and 4 June, 12 and 13 June, and 21 and 22 June. Media included in the sample are dailies *Oslobođenje*, *Nezavisne novine* and *Dnevni avaz*, and online media *klix.ba*, *bljesak-info* and *banjaluka.com*. They were selected based on relevance and reach, but also with the attempt to include media from both entities, based in three major cities- Banjaluka, Mostar and Sarajevo.

the most part pacified; decriminalization of libel assured freedom of journalists from imprisonment; the Freedom of Information Act was adopted on state and entity levels; the public service system was established; there was a proliferation of broadcasters promising media pluralism and transition of the previously state owned print media into private ownership is becoming the thing of the past. However, the weak implementation mechanisms and lack of advanced policy developments have become increasingly evident, in particular with the financial crisis in the background. In the past several years, the positive trends were much reversed, as indicated in the declining position of BiH on global systems of monitoring media freedoms².

The market is populated by nine dailies, more than 180 different magazines, 144 radio stations, 43 television stations³ and a large number of online media, but this abundance is not coupled with high media pluralism or media quality. In fact, the majority of media are receiving merely enough funding to survive, but hardly enough to be promoting journalistic quality. Moreover, the fact that the financially weak media market, ravished by the economic crisis and additionally affected with the migration of advertisers towards foreign and non-journalistic media, is maintaining almost the same number of media outlets over the years raises doubts about possibly conflicting sources of revenues.

Against the background of scarce sources of revenues, the role of government funding has become decisive. While it contributed to the sustainability of the sector, their public interest is doubted and such funding is believed to be curbing editorial policies towards the interests of the ruling parties. Firstly, given that the privatization process was never finalized, local authorities are still the founders and direct financiers of 28 percent of TV stations (out of 43 overall) and 44 percent of radio stations (out of 139 overall). Without assured long-term funding and with the politicized appointments of the management of these broadcasters, they can hardly have a strong public interest role, and instead are mostly perceived as mouthpieces of municipal and cantonal government(s). Similarly,

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Global reports point to the decline in freedom of expression and media professionalism. Ranking of the press freedom index by Reporters sans Frontiers has been mostly declining since 2007, and in 2016 BiH ranged 68th out of 180 countries. A similar decline was registered by Freedom House, with the press in BiH being evaluated as partly free. MSI IREX scores for 2016 especially point to the downfall in terms of business performance and environment (MSI IREX reports available at: <https://www.irex.org>). For more on the risks to media integrity and freedom in BiH, see Media observatory publications, at: www.mediaobservatory.net.

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² Sources: websites of Press Council of B&H and Communications Regulatory Agency.

government advertising or public campaigning contracts, and government donations, have often been questioned for the lack of public interest-criteria and lack of transparency. Media that turn to the advertising market for revenues are hardly free from interference, given that main advertisers are controlled by key political parties, while abuses of advertising contracts for personal financial gains are also considered a common practice⁴. Appointments of the managing structures within the public service broadcasters are highly politicized, which negatively affects their public service role⁵. Public media, including the local broadcasters and the PSB are obliged to dedicate a part of the informative program to minorities and vulnerable groups,⁶ but without systematic monitoring of the broadcaster's content, it remains unclear to what extent and in which manner this obligation is met and whether it regularly includes reporting on civil society.

On the level of media policies, there are no substantial efforts to promote media freedom and pluralism or to promote reporting on the civil sector. For the most part, media are perceived to be a function of particular political and business interests, while the public interest role, including reporting on civil society, is rarely among editorial priorities.

Short overview of the civil society sector

There are no recent data about the number of civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the common estimates suggest around twelve

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See for example article published here: <http://www.zurnal.info/novost/18397/marketinske-prevare-otkrivamo-sumnjive-ugovore-koji-nisu-obuhvaceni-akcijom-gibraltar>; For related controversies concerning audience measurements, also see article published here: <http://www.media-marketing.com/en/opinion/will-ivan-caleta-reign-supreme-over-the-media-space-in-the-region/e>

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There are three public service broadcasters, mirroring the administrative arrangement in the country: state level BHRT, and two entity-level broadcasters: RTV of Federation BiH and RTRS. Radio-television of Republika Srpska (RTRS) is particularly mentioned for favorable reporting on the ruling party in Republika Srpska

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Article 29, Rule 77/2015 on Audio-Visual Media Services, also see Rule 76/2015 on Radio Media Services, as well as the Law on Public Broadcasting System and laws on each of the three public service broadcasters.

thousands are registered on different administrative levels in BiH. Only about half of that number is considered active⁷.

The main sources of revenue for the non-governmental sector by far are the government institutions. In 2012, the public sector provided something over 100 million KM (51.1 million Euro) for non-governmental organizations, while around a third of that sum was estimated to be received from international donors. It is important to note that the revenues from both sources of revenues is declining, raising concerns about their further sustainability, especially if one takes into account the fact that with the economic crisis in the background, funds provided to non-governmental organizations have been cut disproportionately more when compared to other public spending⁸. The yearly revenues of the sector in 2005 were estimated to be around 5.5 million Euro or 4.5 percent of GDP⁹. They declined significantly in the following years, but are still considered an important part of the country's economy¹⁰.

Among the high number of civil society organizations, the part that is focused on the monitoring of the political structures is the most present in the public, but also different NGOs are recognized for delivering particular services to citizens, such as education in different topic areas, distribution of international funds to particular groups of citizens, etc. The participation of the civil sector in decision-making is still not sufficiently promoted at the institutional level, given that no

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⁷ A report from 2005 suggests that then there were around 4629 active non-governmental organizations (Nezavisni biro za humanitarna pitanja (IBHI), 2005, Zapošljavanje, pružanje socijalnih usluga i nevladin (NVO) sektor: status i perspektive za Bosnu i Hercegovinu, available at: http://www.ibhi.ba/Documents/Publikacije/2005/QS3%20NGO%20Sector_bos.pdf; Another source from 2011 suggest 6600 are active (Siebenmann E, and Kolić, A, 2011, Civil Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Seeking the way forward, United Nations Voluneers (UNV) programme

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Source Muhić, A.A., 2013. In Ninković-Papić, R. Civil inclusion Foundtion Sarajevo and Civil Society Promotion Centre. p.5. Available at: https://www.cin.ba/images/pdf/Pismo_glava_lzdvajanja_vladinog_sektora_za_nevladin_sektor_u_Bosni_i_Hercegovini_za_2012_godinu.pdf

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Last available data by IBHI, 2005, p.2.

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¹⁰ See Numanović, A. 2016. Numanović, Millions u NVO nezanemariv dio ekonomije BiH. Mediacentar Sarajevo. Available at: <http://media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/milioni-u-nvo-nezanemariv-dio-ekonomije-bih> but there is no newer data.

state strategy on civil society exists and at the state level the policy dialogue between the Council of Ministers and civil society has not been formalized¹¹.

Political activism is ongoing at different levels and in different forms, but its influence on policies remains marginal. Citizen protests have been a frequent occurrence, and especially in the recent years several protests involved a large numbers of participants. In the summer 2013, thousands of protesters gathered in Sarajevo to demand legislation for the national identification numbering system¹². In February 2014, mass protests gathered even larger numbers of several thousands of citizens in anti-government protests in several cities, mainly in FBiH, with a series of demands published, including requests for resignations of officials. Lack of responsiveness and failure of government(s) to introduce substantial changes highlighted the democratic shortcomings in the country¹³. In the latest general elections held in October 2014, the turnout amounted to 54.5 percent¹⁴, and while abstinence is considered an indicator of lack of citizens' trust toward political parties, the political class and state institutions in general, the elections did not bring major changes in power sharing.

Lack of communication and cooperation within the civil sector, as well as between the civil sector, authorities and the media, is mentioned as a major challenge for civil society.¹⁵ In general, unwarrantably high expectations, poor

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European Commission, 2015, Commission Staff Working Document: Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015 Report, p. 9. available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_bosnia_and_herzegovina.pdf

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The legal vacuum at the time did not allow for registration of new citizens, which caused many difficulties; it hampered the access of the newborn to health care. The interim solution was adopted swiftly, while the final legislative change was adopted later in 2013.

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Freedom House took it as a reason to reduce the score for political rights by one point. The country is in sum considered partly free. More at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/bosnia-and-herzegovina>

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[Ⓜ] Data of Central Election Commission, BiH, available here: https://izbori.ba/Documents/2015/25052015/Izborni_Pokazatelji_2002-2014.pdf

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[Ⓜ] See for example the web page on civil society at the Delegation of EU in BiH, at: http://europa.ba/?page_id=679, Also see Siebenmann E, and Kolić, A, 2011, p 10, as well as report by TACSO, 2014-

communication on their functioning, as well as some claims of political affiliation and overt lavishness of civil society actors are believed to affect the level of public trust in non-government organizations.¹⁶

Frequent but mostly superficial and reactive media reporting on civil society

“Civil society” is a phrase that rarely appears in media content in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even when mentioned, it is mostly referred to at an abstract level, without attempting to define or analyze what civil society is and what it ideally should be. As secondary sources suggest¹⁷, in 2015, civil society had been mentioned 60 times by four major dailies, but in only 28 of those articles the references were direct, and even then mainly as a part of statements of speakers. Indicatively, primarily government officials (in 17 out of 28 cases) mention civil society in statements that suggest the civil sector is one of the major stakeholders in the reform processes. In sum, civil society is not reported about in detail and is not meaningfully discussed.

The analysis done for the purposes of this report involved not only mentioning of the phrase “civil society”, but also other terms through which the members of civil society are identified, such as “organization”, “association”, “foundation”, “trade union” and in some contexts “workers” “parents” or “citizens”. The analysis shows that civil society, or its different segments were mentioned 131 times in the period of 14 days, in six analyzed media outlets. This suggests that civil society, in some of its manifestations, is in fact reported upon on a daily basis. This is particularly the case with the most popular online news websites.

When it comes to the importance given to articles of the analyzed dailies that mention civil society, they were relatively prominent, mostly placed on pages 4th

Civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, available here: http://www.tacso.org/doc/ipsos_report_ba.pdf, where it is reported that as much as two thirds of CSOs believe that consultations mechanisms with the government exist only pro forma (page 6) .

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¹⁶ See for example a series of articles published by Mediacentar Sarajevo, available at: <http://media.ba/bs/tags/civilno-drustvo-i-mediji>. Accessed 28 June 2016.

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Čilić, U. 2016. Šta nam je potrebno za reforme?, article published by Mediacentar Sarajevo, available at <http://media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/sta-nam-je-potrebno-za-reforme>, Accessed 28 June 2016.

to 13th, while a smaller part of the articles were also located in the last several pages, dedicated to culture, and only few were occupying the first three pages. Overall, civil society is given relatively high importance by the media, but mostly pertaining to current events such as protests of workers, negotiations about status of workers etc., while the “regular” actions and long-term processes are less present and less prominent.

In most of the cases, civil society actors are mentioned in a neutral context. There were only six instances of positive and three instances of negative valence of reporting on civil society, all being a result of the quoted evaluations by the media sources and pertaining to specific actors/cases. While such overall neutral reporting might be considered a desirable practice, in accordance with the concept of journalistic objectivity, it was however also accompanied with overall disengagement of media outlets in terms of the lack of depth of reporting and lack of its political potential. Even when initial elements for building political relevance are included in the text, for example the collocutors directly criticize specific policy of local governance¹⁸, media outlets rarely provide extensive information and in-depth insights that would verify the claims included in the text, provide more information on the accountability and any suggestions about the needed policy changes. This analysis revealed that dailies still provide more background information compared to the online news media.

Articles often included statements that point to the problems faced by certain citizens, and provided indicators of accountability of officials for these problems, and sometimes were even missing crucial information for understanding the issue and accountability for the identified problems¹⁹. For example, claims about poor conditions in student dorms, evaluations about the compromised judiciary in the context of processing war crimes, information on the failure of the

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See for example article published here: <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/radnici-gikil-a-blokirali-magistralni-put-upitan-je-opstanak-hiljadu-porodica/160516035>, and here <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/radnici-gikil-a-blokirali-magistralni-put-upitan-je-opstanak-hiljadu-porodica/160516035>

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For example, while other media published an article about the part of IPA funds that the government failed to use, *Oslobođenje* clearly states it was due to the inability of leading officials to come to an agreement and it furthermore spells out a need for the policy steps towards informing the public and setting up a web platform that will facilitate the use and access to IPA funds. Article “IPA fondovi nisu humanitarna pomoć”, *Oslobođenje*, 3 jun 2016.

government to submit the draft law on war veterans in the parliamentary procedure, information on disempowered workers in particular companies, claims on the parts of IPA funds the government failed to use, about debt of the government towards farmers, and many other issues, were all covered by the analyzed media, but without providing additional information that would help users to judge the situation, government accountability, needed government actions and potential means of citizen participation.

Judging by the analyzed content, while there is an overall diversity of news sources at the level of the entire sample, rarely are the voices of both, the civil society and public sector on particular issues presented in the same article. This limits insights for those that are not regular readers of such media, and in general suggest that the analyzed mainstream media rarely serve as a platform in which the two sectors communicate. In fact, officials were rarely consulted for statements about criticism by civil society, which can be justified with the imperatives of fast news production in these types of media, but also can be argued to be contributing to a sort of normalization of the practice in which the officials sometimes might be criticized, but are rarely if at all specifically called for accountability and engaged in dialogue with the public.

The very core of the media system, as well as the editorial policies of online news outlets and dailies oriented towards short and swift daily reporting is not conducive to in-depth investigation and analyses²⁰ and therefore the results of the analysis are largely lacking. However, even under such limitations, some background information can be sought and provided, as illustrated in a minority of the analyzed articles.

In few analyzed articles the media missed the opportunity to critically review and distance itself from the problematic statements of state officials,²¹ which suggest

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☒ On scarcity of investigative reporting see for example MSI Irex reports, and Hodzic, S. 2004. Chapter on BiH in Petković and Bašić-Hrvatini (ed). Media Integrity Matters. Peace Institute. Available at: <http://mediaobservatory.net/radar/media-integrity-matters-%E2%80%93-book-see-media-observatory>

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☐ For example in an article published 28 April 2016 by Nezavisne novine titled “*Najznačajnije resore u Vladi RS treba da vode novi ljudi*”, the report by Center for Civic Initiatives was quoted by the official as a proof that in 2015 “the National Assembly of Republika Srpska was more efficient than the Parliament FBiH and Parliamentary Assembly BiH, a statement that remained unchallenged and uncoupled with any evidence or counter-evidence.

that the minimum critical distance from the statements of the sources is sometimes missing. By contrast, for example, an article published by Oslobođenje provided a simple yet a decisive intervention. Namely, in an article from 3 July 2016, titled “Dijelite sudbinu ukupnih prilika u RS-u” [“You share the faith of the overall circumstances in RS”], the claim in the title directed by an official to the pensioners implies unwarranted relativization of both the position of a marginalized population of citizens, as well as accountability for social problems. Without the need to engage in an extensive research, the journalist confronts such a claim simply by providing information that the official was driven to and back from this meeting by a helicopter, thus indicating that political elites, i.e. “not everyone shares the same destiny”.

Several articles within the sample stood out because of well-selected sources, which provided thorough information, analysis and information on needed legislative and policy changes. In the period of reporting on protests by workers because of difficult working conditions and violation of labor rights, an article²² in which a trade union organization pointed out a few major problems that contribute to such a situation and urge for the revision of privatization in accordance to the law and for stipulations of the law on bankruptcy procedure to be changed, provides an important contribution to insights into these interrelated problems.

Another example of a good practice was an article published by website klix.ba²³. Besides an analysis by a well-selected expert on the issue of overt spending by the public sector, it also provided a list of previously published articles about new employments in the public sector (despite a moratorium on new hiring). This is a simple contribution that backed up the claims of the media sources and by which they were given greater leverage.

The results of the analysis additionally point to a still pervading fragmentation of the media sector, in particular when it comes to the topics and cases that carry particular ethnic relevance. This was mostly identifiable in online articles about

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For example, see article here: <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/savez-samostalnih-sindikata-nikad-gore-stanje-u-privredi-i-realnom-sektoru/160526068>

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²³The article is available here: <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/maligno-tkivo-ekonomije-drzavne-institucije-i-firme-u-bih-imaju-240-000-zaposlenih/160610033>

anniversaries of particular war crimes, as well as about the position of war veterans, victims and families, where media outlets are still functioning as separate spaces divided by ethnic and entity lines, reporting mainly on “our” victims and “their” crimes. Fragmentation is also partly visible in the selection of topics and sources, with media covering more the events and developments from the same entity that the outlet is based on.

And finally, reporting on the civil sector does not seem to be based on any strategic orientation and thought-through approach by the media, but rather on an *ad hoc* approach, reporting on everyday events, such as protests of workers, different events, statements and press releases by civil society. As suggested by several respondents of this research, while civil society actions and ideas are more likely to get coverage, but also to receive criticism from certain political actors and the affiliated media, they are mostly related to party-political topics²⁴. The issues that are related to “softer” politics or that relate more to technical matters will not be faced with similar hostility but media will, in general, show less interest²⁵. Reporting on marginalized groups and civil society that is engaging on promoting their rights is mostly politically correct in the mainstream media, but they also involve some prejudice, while there are also websites that publish radically hostile content concerning LGBT rights²⁶.

How civil society views the media: neither allies nor adversaries

Respondents of this research for the most part consider media partly as passive allies of civil society, partly as their adversaries, but, lamentably, not active allies in the struggle for transparency and good governance. Experiences of our respondents vary, and while the majority believes information from civil society mostly gets fair media coverage, some also point to the examples of media denying access to civil society organizations or negative labeling of those organizations as foreign mercenaries²⁷.

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☒For example Amra Hodžić of the Radio Federation BiH, submitted questionnaire, June 2016. Anti-corruption initiatives and analyses of political parties.

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☐As noted by Edin Hodžić from the Centar for Social Research Analitika, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

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☒Most often mentioned in this regard is website Saff.

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The media community is primarily polarized about issues related to transitional justice and facing the past. Goran Zorić from the youth organization Kwart speaks of his experiences with the latest example of: “refusal of Kozarski vijesnik to publish a mentioning about ... kids killed in Prijedor. There are also the distorted reports by RTRS about this event”²⁸. However, Zorić mentioned few good examples of cooperation with media concerning the same topic. “One of the positive examples was an article by Dragan Bursać, published at website Buka, reporting on two murdered children and the fight for the memorial for the children killed in Prijedor. We jointly backed it up with facts and the information we had. Or for example when we asked a journalist of Radio Free Europe to report on Ljubija and after the report which described catastrophic circumstances in which people there are living, there was a huge response by people that wanted to help”.

Civil society initiatives that jeopardize or involve criticism against particular officials or parties risk to attract criticism and to be covered in a politicized manner by part of the media. Ivana Korajlić of the Transparency International BiH from her experience mentioned media in Republika Srpska, mainly RTRS, Nezavisne novine and Glas Srpske for politicized reporting on the civil sector, but also points out that the examples of fair reporting on the civil sector are much more numerous²⁹.

Beyond politically-sensitive topics, the reasons for lack of substantial, engaged and continuous reporting on civil society in general are numerous, involving lack of resources, but also editorial orientation away from public interest and towards sensationalism and commercialized content. Media are believed to be increasingly relying on ready-made content, including that coming from the civil society³⁰. Several respondents also noted that media do not sufficiently recognize the value of different reports and analyses by CSOs, nor do they acknowledge the quality of information and knowledge they can acquire from the sector. Meliha Sendić from the Center for legal help for Women, Zenica, noted

□ Examples mentioned by Amra Hodžić from Radio Federation BiH are part of a campaign against Amnesty international BiH through few major media in Republika Srpska, or publishing of information on salaries in the Centre of Civic Initiatives with the aim of discrediting them

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Interview, 3 June 2016.

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☒ Telephone interview, 3 June 2016.

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☒ As suggested by Goran Zorić.

that continuous reporting is mainly related to the media actions that are financially supported³¹. Zoran Ivaničić notes that media got so accustomed to paid announcements that they often ask for financial compensation for publishing content related to issues of public interest. On the other hand, several respondents also point out that part of the reason for flawed reporting by mainstream media is the lack of understanding of civil society on how media function and what they regard as newsworthy. Press releases are often written in a format that is not interesting for the media, respondents from the media outlets indicated. As Almir Panjeta from Slobodna Bosna noted, the press releases are often too long and unclear since some key information is often missing. Furthermore, the entire communication by civil society is focused on press releases only, and the subject of the communication is not well-thought, suggests Goran Zorić from Kwart, adding that civil society organizations communicate more about the activities than about the ideas and values that should be in the center of attention. Civil society is largely passive and closed in relation to media, unwilling to share more information and provide comments when asked by the media³², but also it is largely project-oriented, without a long-term strategic focus on certain issues that would make them relevant participants in communication on those issues beyond duration of particular projects³³.

Too often, the quality of relations between the media and civil society depend on the engagement and sensitization of individual journalists³⁴, instead of being part of strategic orientation of either media outlets or the civil society actors. This lack of strategic approach is visible in the difference between regular reporting and reporting on particular dates relevant for particular issues. As noted by Vedrana Frašto from Foundation CURE, reporting on women rights organizations on 8th of March is mostly politically correct, but: "In other situations, if media report on marginalized groups or the NGO sector, they will mostly report with stereotypes and sensationalism."³⁵ Overall, there is no continuous and in-depth reporting on

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Submitted questionnaire, June 2016

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Both journalists (Rubina Čengić, Marija Arnautović) and civil society representatives (Goran Zorić, Ivana Korajlić)

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Rubina Čengić, of magazine Start for example points to these problems.

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As noted by Huremović and Frašto, submitted questionnaires, June 2016.

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public-interest issues or analyses on the role of civil society and its value for local communities³⁶. As noted by one of the respondents: “NGOs work on important projects – for example safe houses for victims of violence, other social services, participation in discussions and decision-making on different levels of governance, legislative changes, democratic dialogue on important issues. However, such actions are mostly not in the focus of the media, which is more inclined towards simplified...visions of the nongovernmental sector”³⁷.

Despite these problems, respondents believe that in the majority of cases, important actions and ideas from civil society get an overall fair media coverage, although possibly not by all media. Few respondents mention positive examples of media coverage, mainly coverage of the campaign “I am Museum,” an initiative which resulted in the re-opening of the National Museum in Sarajevo, as well as coverage of protests from 2013 (Bebolution or JMBG protests)³⁸ after which the problem with issuing new identification numbers got firstly a temporary and later a permanent solution.

Journalist Rubina Čengić of magazine Start mentions few good experiences of cooperation with civil society actors: “The best experience was with Transparency International; I had a journalistic assignment to do an interview with young people that experienced or observed some cases of corruption and they (TI) helped me a lot with some contacts, invited me to events attended by young people who discuss corruption”³⁹.

³⁶Submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

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³⁷As indicated for example by Zoran Ivačnić, activist, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

On the other hand, an example of negative campaign based on superficial arguments about the abundant foreign funding for actions of allegedly no public interests, is available here:

<http://novi.ba/clanak/73149/majstori-ublehe-najvece-zvijezde-granta-u-bosni-i-hercegovini?page=1>

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³⁸Edin Hodžić, Center for Social Research Analitika, Sarajevo.

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³⁹As noted for example by Almir Panjeta, Slobodna Bosna, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

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She also adds that the founders of an NGO are simultaneously owners of magazine Start, which fosters their cooperation on many topics. Rubina Čengić, magazine Start, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

In terms of overall communication with civil society and between different sectors, the respondents agree that the role of social networks and blogs,⁴⁰ as well as some non-governmental platforms, is becoming more and more relevant. Civil society organizations are increasingly using social networks in their communication practices, especially those related to the younger population. As one of our respondents said: “We are an organization that deals with youth and the use of social networks is very important for us. The initiative “Because I am concerned” (Jer me se tiče) communicates its entire engagement through social networks” (Goran Zorić, organization Kvart, Prijedor). However, media are still considered pivotal for the overall reach of civil society initiatives, as well in terms of fostering citizen participation (more below).

Bodies where the civil society and media almost meet

While the laws on public service broadcasters envisage the existence of editorial or program councils, in practice, only Radio Television of Republika Srpska (RTRS), one out of three public service broadcasters has established this advisory body⁴¹. In theory, the body includes participants from different segments of society, including the civil sector. In the case of RTRS, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska appointed them. Radmila Žigić, a former member of the Program Council of RTRS noted that under the circumstances in which the public service system is almost by “default” in the function of the ruling political structures, for the few years this body had found a way to influence the program and contribute to better representations of different interests of citizens⁴². The situation soon changed: “When it became somewhat clear that we are not going

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□ Two respondents for example mention that blog of Srđan Puhalo is increasingly accepted and reach significant respondents, and that it provides engaged analysis on socially relevant issues reporting of media (submitted questionnaires, June 2016).

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□ As noted by Radenko Udovičić, previous member of the Board of Governors on public service broadcaster RTVFBiH, the reasons that the Program Council does not exist are mostly procedural, since the several calls for Council members the response was not enough to enable all conditions for their appointment to be fulfilled (members from different cantons, from different constituents, minorities, members of different associations...), but he also adds that this is probably welcomed by the management since it's easier for them to make decisions without such advisory interference (Telephone conversation, 15 June 2016)

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Although the consultations between the public and the Council were never introduced despite the initiative by the members of the Council, Žigić ads.

to act as defenders of editorial policy of RTRS... the role of the Program council was reduced to a formality. We met two times a year to give our opinion on the Winter and Summer programmatic scheme". "This is how the Program Council functions today", she added⁴³.

The Communications Regulatory Agency (CRA) is a public body with a decisive role in the protection of the public interests and regulation in the sector of broadcasting. The credibility of CRA is increasingly questioned in recent years, one of the reasons being the perceived politicized appointments of members of the CRA Council. The amendments to the Law on Communications, adopted in 2012, introduced an *ad hoc* body that is proposing the list of 14 candidates for the CRA Council. While the body consists of the same number of political representatives and the representatives of civil society, and thus seems as a step towards greater participation in decision-making, in fact, the selection of the members of the *ad hoc* body is done by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and is designed to assure the dominance of political interests⁴⁴. Therefore, it is not considered that this change contributed to better representation of citizen's interests in these procedures. On the contrary, under strong political interference, even the stipulation in the Law on Communication on gender equality is completely disregarded, since the current composition of the Council does not include a single female member.⁴⁵

Finally, the Press Council in BiH oversees the self-regulatory system in the print and online sector. Its Board of Directors and Assembly consist of the members coming from the media community, but the Complaints Commission, which processes complaints concerning content published by online and print media, includes members from different sectors. Out of ten members, three come from

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☒Telephone interview, 16 June 2016.

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Furthermore, the list proposed by the *ad hoc* body is sent first to the Council of Ministers, whose role remains unclear, and then submitted to the parliamentary procedure. In case the Parliamentary Assembly does not approve the proposed candidates, the entire procedure has to be repeated and practically no limitations in this regard are specified.

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Having said this, it is important to also note that there have not been significant critique of the way that CRA processes the complaints concerning the program of the broadcasters, but rather critiques on the lack of reactions in some cases and lack of monitoring of media content, so in this aspect of the CRA functioning, the interests of the citizens are relatively protected.

universities, three from the judiciary and four from the media⁴⁶. The Press Council is one of the most respected self-regulatory bodies in the region, contributing to the protection of citizen interests and promotion of journalistic values, and the composition of its managing bodies has not been substantially criticized.

Media-related nongovernmental organizations: providing what is missing in the mainstream media

Some of the media outlets that are registered as non-profit and non-governmental organizations play an important role in terms of the diversity of media offered in the country. In fact, the Center for Investigative Journalism, Žurnal and Buka are most frequently mentioned as media sources that provide either investigative journalism pieces or valuable content independent from the influence of the local political and economic centers of power.

In addition to these media outlets, there are also several online sources that are registered and/or are functioning as nongovernmental organizations that, through different activities (research, different analyses, educational programs, online platforms, events etc.), focus on freedom of expression and media-related issues. In a way, they belong to both the media community and civil society. Such organizations are recognized by our interviewees and surveyed respondents as valuable for several reasons, mainly because they provide relatively systematic and constant analysis of media policies and media practices. Judging by the evaluation of the respondents, online platforms such as media.ba or analiziraj.ba, are recognized as relevant and reliable sources of information for and about the media community. Other platforms of civil society are a valuable contribution to communication about particular issues of public relevance⁴⁷. Some of these platforms were considered to have provided a valuable contribution during citizen protests, by countering the unfavorable reporting about the protests by the mainstream media and providing missing accounts on events (for example AbrasMEDIA and media.ba). At times, social media platforms provided

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☒Source: Press council, more at:

http://english.vzs.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=585%3Ainformation-on-the-press-council-in-bosnia-herzegovina&catid=7%3Aabout-us&Itemid=10&lang=en

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☒An example is a platform on position and rights of people with disabilities, at:

<http://ukljuci.in/bs/>, as mentioned by respondent Almir Panjeta, of magazine Slobodna Bosna.

alternative narratives, involving personal testimonies and citizen reports on police brutality, marginalized in mainstream media.

Although they are providing an important alternative, the respondents noted that the reach of these platforms is still limited to relatively closed circles of users. As Aleksandar Brezar from online platform analiziraj.ba said "...it will take time for the society to become digitally more literate, or that the shift of generations happens, in which these platforms will become more relevant than other media."⁴⁸

Both of the types of organizations, both the journalistic platforms and platforms related to journalism, are mainly funded by international donors, who on one side foster editorial independence and critique of local centers of power, but on the other also bring uncertainty with regard to their long-term sustainability.

Media, civil society and public participation

Mainstream media are considered to hold the power for mass citizen mobilization, but that this power has been mostly underused because media fail to report more substantially on issues of public interest. In some cases, this power has also been largely misused, and the respondents in particular mention favoritism towards official sources and perspectives that many mainstream media demonstrated during the February citizen protests in 2014.

Secondary sources suggest that mainstream media, in the end, contributed to the demise of the protests⁴⁹. Lack of in-depth information and details about the issues relevant for the protests, initial focus on protest violence, perseverance of visual representation of violence in media reports long after the outburst of violence stopped, uncritical coverage of spinning against protests originating from government officials (promoting ethnic-national divides and pointing to alleged criminal behavior of protesters) were some of the factors that diverted the focus from the protests rationale and demands. While social networks, in particular Facebook, were identified as crucial platforms for informing and mobilizing citizens, the same report suggested that televised communication is

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Interview, 22 June 2016.

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It is important to note that the results of content analysis within the same research did support such evaluations only in part. See Cvjetičanin, T, in Hodžić and Pajnik (ed.). Foundation "Mediacentar", 2016.

decisive for the wider reach, sustainability of protest actions and for achieving the desired changes.

Respondents of this research recognize the importance of social networks in fast exchange of information and interactivity, and as platforms through which citizens were mobilized for few massive protests. Beyond these few cases, the respondents indicate that the role of social networks remains confined to the discussion between a relatively closed group of people, and also noted that they include few problematic aspects as well. One of the respondents additionally noted that the practices can be as (un)democratic as the society in general “how much is this alternative space more democratic and to what extent is it on the other hand merely mirroring a divided society”⁵⁰, while others also mentioned a problem of questionable reliability of information shared on social networks. Beyond the few exceptions, much of the “activities on social networks mainly remain on the margins, in separate space which is construed and maintained as elitist, without meaningful outflow to traditional media and to society, or the citizens” noted one of the respondents⁵¹.

When it comes to mainstream media, as noted earlier, the results of content analysis suggest that the analyzed print and online news media rarely provide in-depth information and analysis, that they do not cover issues promoted by civil sector in a systematic manner, and mostly do not promote dialogue between media and civil society on issues of public interest or explore government accountability. As such, these media do not act as major initiators and promoters of public participation. However, where there is an initiative with strong message and strong support, mainstream media seem to be necessary for reaching the wider citizens support and/or for achieving a policy impact. Even considerable media reporting on certain issues and support for civil society initiatives does not necessarily lead to desired results. For example, the reaction of the Center for Legal Help for Women, in the town of Zenica about the fact that the Government of the Zenica-Doboj Canton did not involve a single female minister had a considerable echo in the media, but this has not led to any changes. “We still have a small number of women in the executive power”, noted Meliha Sendić⁵².

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Edin Hodžić, Centar of Social Research Analitika, submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

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Ibid.

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Lack of responsiveness by political officials, despite different platforms used for communication and increased opportunities for interactions, is the main problem. Civil society is overall portrayed as a valuable contributor to public discussions that foster citizen participation, but their strength in achieving policy changes is seen as minor⁵³, if faced with hostile or unresponsive mainstream media and/or with unresponsive decision-makers. As respondents indicate, part of the problem is also the lack of unified efforts by civil society for important changes, and the lack of an “institutionalized platform for consultations between the public and institutions”⁵⁴.

Conclusions

Neither media nor civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina is believed to be substantially contributing to public participation. There are six main and interconnected reasons identified in this research: a) weak messages by civil society (often focused on their activities instead of the overall ideas and policy requirements) and lack of know-how and capacities to present them in a newsworthy manner b) lack of public-interest engagement and continuous reporting by the media, as well as political interference in editorial policies c) lack of joint engagement of different segments of civil society, d) lack of joint engagement of both civil society and media in persistent promotion of issues of public interest, f) lack of responsiveness of the officials to such initiatives and pressures, and d) lack of wider citizen engagement.

Several positive examples of media reporting and few examples of cooperation between media and civil society organizations mentioned in this report can offer some guidelines for both the media and civil society actors. Namely, small engagement by the media, such as pointing to further sources on particular issues, providing multiple views, distancing from problematic statements can make an important difference even when media do not have the resources or mission that involve investigative and in-depth reporting. Civil society on the other hand should also rethink the messages they are communicating towards media and instead of mainly promoting the civil society actions *per se* aim to promote the main ideas and suggestions on how to improve services and

Submitted questionnaire, June 2016.

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See for example Keil, S and Perry, K, 2016, State Building and Democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rutledge.

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□ As Ivana Korajlić of TI noted.

decisions of the public sector. Civil society actors should also develop their practices and communication skills with the media, including more continuous, strategic communication, organizing interesting events and writing good press releases. Improvement of mutual communication and cooperation between media and civil society on issues of public interest is indicated as a needed step towards greater public participation. Additionally, structural changes in terms of greater independence from local stakeholders and in terms of more strategic orientation of both media and civil society organizations towards issues of public interest should also be pursued as long-term goals.

Finally, developing institutionalization mechanisms of consultations between officials and the public should assure greater responsiveness of institutions and greater impact of civil society initiatives on the decision-making processes. Both media and civil society can play a crucial role in examining the responsiveness of the governments and investigating if and how they are building in the civil society voices in their policy processes. Only when this is turned into themes in the public discourse in a more substantial way will the participation be recognized by the authorities as a necessary means to demonstrate their democratic credentials.

One should also not underestimate the importance of the civil sector in disseminating support and providing services to particular groups of people, in providing information that would otherwise be difficult to access, or in offering different education programs, which in their own right bring relevant benefits for the society.