



South East European Network
for Professionalization of Media

Framing a Critical Juncture in Serbian-Croatian Relations

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1. Introduction

After more than 25 years of post-communist development, Serbia is still a weak, “incomplete state” (Dimitrijević 2003), torn by deep cleavages and fragmented national identities. After listening to the elites of the post-Milošević era promising a better life in a new, market-based democratic system for well over a decade, the public mood is one of disappointment, dissatisfaction with society and distrust in political institutions (Stojiljković 2015). One of the weak pillars of Serbia’s fragile, semi-consolidated democracy is its media system.

Serbia’s relations with Croatia are one aspect of its current malaise. Both countries are still dealing with the after-effects of their war in the early 1990s, particularly its legacy of deep polarisation and hate-mongering. This report highlights the danger that media coverage of their disputes and conflicts could revive and legitimise an adversary relationship between Serbia and Croatia in the public sphere.

The research conducted for this study is based chiefly on a frame analysis of how five Serbian media outlets reported a particular incident in Serbia-Croatia relations in December 2016.

1.1. The media in economic and political context

Journalism in Serbia is in a state of crisis. Its condition is well-described by the president of the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina, Nedim Sejdinović: “Everything bad that could happen to the journalism profession has happened in Serbia” (Unkić, 2017).

Although the crisis of Serbian media reflects global trends, its structural roots are deeply embedded in the specific characteristics of the country’s media sector. The post-communist reconstruction of the media industry from 2000 onwards was chaotic, fragmented, non-transparent and instrumentalised for political goals. It did not provide a functional basis for business sustainability and media freedom.

Today, the media function in a poor, unregulated and distorted market, with non-transparent ownership structures, the state as a powerful and politically-motivated source of funding, and politically affiliated marketing agencies (Matić, Valić Nedeljkić 2014). The media are economically dependent on the state, which is partocratic in nature.¹ According to a 2015 survey of 1,100 journalists, 62 per cent believed there was no freedom of the media in Serbia, 77 per cent believed the state controlled the media, and 73 per cent said the media were blighted by self-censorship (Mihailović 2015).

¹ Partocracy is a “fusion of the party, state, and economic elites in political-economic networks characterised by patronage, clientelism and corruption” (Kitschelt 1995, 155), where the state administration, public companies, management boards, educational and cultural institutions, media, even the judiciary become subservient to the ruling party” (Stojiljković 2016, 21).

The general trends of news reporting in recent years include a reduction of volume and thematic diversity of content, decreasing reliance on staff reporters in favour of ready-made stories, less thorough reporting, less pluralism of opinion, the disappearance of investigative journalism, adjusting content to the interests of advertisers, avoidance of controversial topics, increased political partiality and frequent violations of ethical standards. According to Tamara Skrozza, a member of the Press Council, eight daily newspapers violated the rules of the Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics 8,636 times in 5,477 articles in the period from March to December 2016. On average, each of the monitored papers ran three or four articles that violated the code every day.²

The economic environment for the media has been worsening since the 2008 economic slump and the rise to power of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in 2012. European Commission progress reports on Serbia's EU integration process warn year after year that conditions for the full exercise of freedom of expression have yet to be fulfilled.

1.2. The media's role in maintaining political power

Serbia's current political system has been described variously as illiberal democracy, populist democracy, competitive authoritarianism and neo-liberal authoritarianism. All these terms designate a system where the rulers, chosen in free elections, do not respect legal limitations on their rule and violate guaranteed freedoms and rights in order to protect their particular interests. According to political scientist Zoran Lutovac, the government promotes Serbia as a consolidated democracy assailed by ignorant critics and the unjust conditionality policy of the EU.³ In reality, however, Serbia's problems arise from such factors as the absence of a division of power, the privileged position of ruling parties in elections, ruling party pressure on other election participants and voters, widespread political corruption, and attacks on the opposition by the media, which behave as party bulletins of the most powerful person in the state, Aleksandar Vučić. (Vučić was prime minister during the period covered in this report. He was elected president of Serbia in April 2017.) Criticism is treated as a hostile activity fomented by enemies of the state. "The prime minister positions himself as the supreme social arbiter, a *paterfamilias*, who exercises patronage over other institutions and bases his policies on direct communication with citizens," Lutovac said in early 2017. Slobodan Antičić, a professor at the Belgrade University Philosophy Faculty, holds that the SNS under Vučić "combines the personal authority of one leader and political marketing as the only true, party ideology" (Švarn 2015).

The success of Vučić's political marketing is enabled by the silent support it gets from the majority of news media, which restrain from covering critical views of government policies, and by the very loud support of several media outlets such as TV Pink, RTV Studio B and the tabloids *Informer* and *Srpski Telegraf*. The latter serve not only as Vučić's mouthpieces but also as vehicles for attacks on the opposition or

² Interview with Tamara Skrozza, member of the Press Council, Belgrade, 27 January 2017

³ Interview with Zoran Lutovac, senior research fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade, 31 January 2017

potential competitors. An additional component is a large army of SNS party bots who post comments on news sites and social networks to give the appearance of genuine public debate.

As an example of how successful this political marketing campaign has been, in 2016 Vučić's photograph appeared 696 times on 681 front pages of six daily papers (Jahić, 2017).

Rapid reaction to breaking news stories is a key part of the government's media strategy, frequently by quickly calling official news conferences so as to impose the official interpretation. Two other contrasting strategies are also prominent: downplaying the possibility of crisis, and creating crisis, then following up with a quick "solution".

Highly-charged situations – whether true crises (disastrous floods or large numbers of refugees transiting the country), downplayed (arrests of businessmen and officials of the previous government that were never followed up by prosecutors, public protests over the demolition of buildings in Belgrade's Savamala district) or created (alleged coup attempts, threats of war) – very often boil down to conflicts between "us" and "them", i.e. the government and its enemies. The official versions of reality are later echoed in the media closest to the government and supplemented with harsh language, smear campaigns and speculation. A third of the breaches of professional ethics in the eight dailies monitored in 2016 were related to inaccurate and biased reporting, according to the Press Council's Skrozza – ranging from presenting assumptions, speculation and comments as facts to massive reliance on unverified information from anonymous sources and openly advocating for a political party. Other serious violations the council found include disrespecting the presumption of innocence, the use of derogatory terms for specific groups, spreading ethnic stereotypes and disrespect for the ethics of public debate.

1.3. The Serbian-Croatian knot

This study analyses media coverage of the incident in Serbian-Croatian relations provoked by Croatia's decision in December 2016 not to approve the opening of a new negotiating chapter in Serbia's EU accession talks. The block affected talks on Chapter 26 of the body of EU legislation and principles, dealing with education and culture, which is considered a relatively easy chapter in the lengthy accession process. Serbian authorities expected that the European Commission would open this chapter together with Chapter 5 (on public procurement) and Chapter 25 (science and research) at the Serbia-EU intergovernmental conference held on 13 December 2016 in Brussels. Serbia had begun negotiating four chapters since the beginning of its accession process in 2014.

The conference ended up dealing only with chapters 5 and 25, because Croatia had earlier stalled Chapter 26 in a vote of the Working Party on Enlargement and Countries Negotiating Accession to the EU. In protest, Serbian Prime Minister Vučić left Brussels, where he had travelled to participate in the intergovernmental conference. Croatia's rationale for blocking the education and culture chapter

concerned issues related to the education of the Croat minority in Serbia and return of cultural goods to Croatia. Specifically, its remarks mentioned a shortage of textbooks in the Croatian language for elementary school students and particularly for students in secondary schools. The other demand related to icons, books and other religious objects taken to Serbia from Serbian Orthodox churches in Croatia in the 1990s. Serbia argued that minority education was the subject of Chapter 23, related to fundamental rights, which had already been opened. Other EU countries in favour of opening Chapter 26 held that the dispute should be settled in direct Serbian-Croatian talks.

The incident ended 10 days later. On 23 December, Serbia's Ministry of Education signed agreements with representatives of seven national minorities on publishing 84 textbooks in minority languages, including 18 in Croatian. The agreements in fact were annexes to the already signed memorandum of cooperation with these national minorities on providing a certain number of textbooks in their mother tongues. On the same day, Croatian Foreign Minister announced that Croatia had "withdrawn its reservations" regarding Chapter 26. At the next meeting of the Working Party on Enlargement on 17 January 2017, Croatia and Bulgaria officially approved the opening of the chapter.

Croatia's block on Serbia's accession talks was one among many recent incidents which underlined the fragile and worsening relations between the two countries. Many experts assessed that their relations in 2016 were at the lowest point in the 20 years since diplomatic relations were established after the 1990s war (Popov 2016).

Some authors find the reason for renewed hostility in the clash between Serb and Croat nationalisms that has marked relations between the two ethnic groups for more than a century (Bakić 2016). Dejan Jović, a professor in Zagreb University's Faculty of Political Sciences, sees the beginning of a downward trend in the election of two Tomislavs on the same day in 2012 – Tomislav Nikolić, leader of SNS, as president of Serbia and Tomislav Karamarko as president of the former and future ruling party in Croatia, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).⁴ These politicians and their parties each embody the issues that sharply divide the two nations – very different interpretations of the Second World War, the role of the Yugoslav state established after the war and of the war of the 1990s. The new ruling elites in both countries put a halt to the process of what could be termed the de-ethnification of social consciousness that had started after the fall of the regimes that ruled Croatia and Serbia in the 1990s. The new elites revived the articulation of a collective ethnic identity and renewed the old habit of seeing social problems from an ethnic perspective.

The years 2015 and 2016 in particular saw many incidents in bilateral relations, especially during election periods in both countries. Often these affairs escalated into diplomatic tugs-of-war and the spread of hate speech in the media. Populist views of Serb-Croat relations were legitimised first in official political discourse and then

⁴ See for example <https://radiogornjigrad.wordpress.com/2017/01/18/dejan-jovic-i-tomislav-jakic-o-hrvatsko-srpskim-odnosima/>

amplified by the media. The Press Council found an extreme example of hate speech⁵ in a column by the chief editor of the *Informer* daily, Dragan Vučićević, published on 7 August 2016, after Croatian celebrations of “Operation Storm” – the campaign in 1995 to retake Croatian territory from Serb forces – headlined “Not all Croats are Ustashas⁶, but almost all Croats are Ustashas!” “Croats are taught from an early age to hate everything Serbian; a deeply seated thought in their collective mind is that to murder a Serb is something completely normal, even God-pleasing”, the column said.

Croatia’s move to block the opening of Chapter 26 provoked more strain in diplomatic relations and provided fodder for ample media coverage.

1.4. About this study

This research attempts to assess the conduct of the Serbian media during a critical point in Serbian-Croatian relations. Specifically, the objective of the analysis is to identify patterns of media reporting and assess the journalistic practices during this particular situation, which can be termed a crisis. The analysis relies on the concept of media framing and its application to journalistic practice during a specific incident.

The period of the Chapter 26 dispute was chosen for analysis because it is recent and offers a good opportunity to probe the role of the media in defining the social importance and meaning of events. The crisis did not affect the everyday life of people in Serbia. Its only actual result was to temporarily block the Serbian government from boosting its reputation on the international and domestic scene by taking another successful step (of a formal rather than substantial nature) in the accession process. The 10-day crisis had a clear beginning and end, concluding with a compromise solution.

Five media were selected for the content analysis: the public service broadcaster RTS; a tabloid daily, *Informer*; the semi-tabloid dailies *Blic* and *Večernje novosti*; and a quality daily, *Danas*. These media outlets are representative of different parts of the Serbian media system. They address different audiences and differ in editorial policies. All have either high circulation/viewership or are otherwise influential in some parts of Serbian society.⁷

⁵ Interview with Tamara Skrozza, Belgrade, 27 January 2017

⁶ The Ustasha was the governing political and armed force of the fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH) in the period 1941–1945.

⁷ The public service broadcaster RTS is the most popular source of news in Serbia. Its main news bulletin and debate programs have the highest ratings among TV programmes. It does not fall into the group of media strongly supportive of the government, nor is it critical of the government, acting more like a state than public broadcaster (Matić 2016). It is distinguished from other TV channels by the highly professional skills of its journalists and language that rarely falls below acceptable standards.

Informer is a representative of the tabloid press, an important phenomenon on the Serbian media scene. It takes the lead on unethical journalism. It behaves as a propaganda tool of the ruling party and of Aleksandar Vučić in particular, and also has an open pro-Russian orientation. By its own account, its circulation is 100,000 copies a day and its website is very popular.

Interviews with five journalists and media experts were conducted to give additional insights into the role of the media during this particular incident.

The analysis examined reports in the selected media from the beginning of the crisis (Croatia's decision to block the opening of Chapter 26) to its end with the signing of the agreement with minority communities and Croatia's decision to stop blocking the process. A total of 51 reports were considered: nine from the RTS prime-time news bulletin (13, 14, 23 December); nine from *Informer* (six online reports on 14 December, two on 23 December and one printed article on 24 December); 13 items in *Večernje novosti* (12 from 14 December, one from 24 December), 10 texts from *Blic* (nine from 14 December, one from 24 December) and from *Danas* (nine from 14 December, one from 24–25 December).

2. Research results

2.1. Framing the situation, its actors and potential solutions

The frame analysis set out to identify how the media defined the problem underlying the crisis, which actors they identified as responsible for crisis or contributing to its resolution and how they interpreted the end of the incident.

Reporting on the same event, the media in the sample produced different pictures of reality. The analysis identified several frames relating to the trigger for the incident, Croatia's move to stall the opening of Chapter 26 (see Table 1).

The tabloid-like papers *Blic* and *Večernje novosti* are the most influential dailies. They have similar circulations, somewhat below 100,000 copies. *Blic* runs the most popular Serbian news website. It is owned by a foreign company, Ringier Axel Springer. It promotes a pro-European policy and its reporting on the government is mostly related to issues important for Serbia's accession process; its criticism of government policies is rather mild. *Blic* often violates professional standards, mostly in its entertainment and crime sections.

Večernje novosti is partly state-owned, although this is against the law. It is very favourable to the government, which took part in appointing its director and editor-in-chief Ratko Dmitrović. He reported on the war in Croatia in the 1990s and is known for extremely negative attitudes towards Croatia, whose policies he sees as anti-Serbian oriented. Like *Informer*, the daily is openly pro-Russian and anti-West.

Danas is the rare media outlet oriented on the Serbian public. Its circulation is small, but it is influential in liberal circles and has managed to preserve its independence and critical attitude to all Serbian governments. In today's media environment, *Danas* stands out for its coherent criticism of Vučić's government.

Table 1. How media framed the issue

Dominant frames	Sub-frames
Frame 1: Serbia on the EU road	a) Croatia is trying to slow Serbia's EU integration process (<i>Blic</i>)
	b) Croatia's behaviour is politically motivated under the cloak of concern for the rights of the Croat minority in Serbia (RTS)
Frame 2: Croatian hostility towards Serbia	a) Croatia continues its attempts to humiliate Serbia without reasonable arguments because its only policy is to be against Serbs and Serbia (<i>Večernje novosti, Informer</i>)
Frame 3: Serbia between East and West	a) Croatia stands against Serbia in the name of the West (<i>Večernje novosti</i>)
	b) Croatia's stance against Serbia is retaliation for the arms Serbia receives from Russia (<i>Informer</i>)
Frame 4: Role of state institutions in the accession process	a) The Serbian government could have avoided the partially justified block of Chapter 26 if it listened to the opposition (<i>Danas</i>)

Table 1 shows that dominant media narratives were supported by placing particular events in very different frameworks. Within these different interpretative contexts, the analysed media identified different actors as the most relevant, ascribed a variety of motivations to them and promoted different solutions to the problem, as they perceived it.

2.1.1. Frame 1: Serbia's progress towards accession

In contrast to the dramatic rhetoric of the other media, *Blic* used a mild tone, seeing the events in Brussels as a normal and expected hardship, rather than a crisis, in the only social process that matters – Serbian membership of the EU. It called the accession episode “a petty diplomatic scandal” and blamed Croatian politicians for succumbing to nationalism. Nor did *Blic* show sympathy for what it called the Serbian public's “verbal retaliation” against Croatia's “diplomatic aggression”, instead arguing that the opening of chapters is less important than working to ensure public harmony in the task of “adjusting the society and laws to European standards”.⁸ In *Blic*'s interpretation, there were only two important actors in the crisis episode – the Croatian and Serbian leaderships. The former was portrayed negatively since its actions could have negative consequences for the “popularity of the European idea in

⁸ Comment piece “Usputna osporavanja” (By-way slowdowns), *Blic*, 14 December 2016. p. 2

Serbia”.⁹ Serbian leader Vučić’s role was portrayed positively through selecting passages in his speech that accentuated his commitment to further pro-European reforms.

RTS highlighted Serbia’s success in opening two more accession chapters. One report on Croatia’s actions was introduced with the question: Does this cast a shadow on Serbia’s progress on the EU road?¹⁰ Three groups of actors were indicated as relevant in the dispute: Serbia, Croatia and international actors. The ample two-day coverage included many positions from Serbia and Croatia¹¹, centring the debate on the question of whether Croatia’s decision was motivated by political reasons or, as the Croatian officials quoted in the report insisted, solely by concern for its national minority. This was directly confronted by statements from Serbian officials that Serbia put a lot of effort into bettering the position of the Croat minority, and indirectly by minority representatives saying that producing textbooks is a five- to six-year process, as well as by most of the political analysts interviewed, who described the conflict in political terms. Some on the Croatian side argued that it was not in its national interests to help Serbia enter the EU or that current Serbian leaders, who had supported Serbia’s aggression against Croatia in the 1990s, should not be the ones to take Serbia into the EU. Many Serbian views of Croatia’s actions were presented, typically relying on the claim that Croatia was bothered by various Serbian success stories (its economic achievements, acquiring new military aircraft to defend its people, etc.). All international actors quoted praised Serbia’s success in the EU integration process and suggested the problem would soon be resolved.

2.1.2. Frame 2: Serbian progress and Croatian hostility

Večernje novosti and *Informer* used a lot of exclamation marks in their headlines to dramatise an affair they pictured as having been provoked by Croatia as a way to “prevent even greater successes by Serbia” in its relations with the EU. The only culprit in the incident was Croatia. Its motivation was placed in the framework of a historically-rooted permanent Croat-Serb hostility. As *Informer* emphasised by its selection of quotations from Vučić’s speech, Croatia’s “only policy is to be against the Serbs and Serbia”.¹² *Večernje novosti* stressed President Nikolić’s perspective that the problem originated with the “hatred” in Croatia, resulting in a contest over “who will do greater harm to Serbia or humiliate it”.¹³ Both dailies stressed those parts of

⁹ “Hrvatska nas neće ponižavati” (Croatia shall not humiliate us). *Blic*, 14 December 2016, p. 4

¹⁰ Journalist’s introduction to a correspondent’s report from Brussels, RTS *Dnevnik*, 13 December 2016

¹¹ Two reports dealt with this question directly. The first was introduced as an analysis of the “real reasons” for Croatia’s block (RTS *Dnevnik*, 13 December 2016), and the second covered the continuing “sharp polemics between Zagreb and Belgrade” (RTS *Dnevnik*, 14 December 2016).

¹² “Vučić: Neće nam držati lekcije oni koji stavljaju ‘Za dom spremni’ u Jasenovcu i kojima smetaju srpske čokoladice!”, *Informer* online, 13 December 2016. Available at <http://informer.rs/vesti/politika/108024/VUCIC-Nece-nam-drzati-lekcije-oni-koji-stavljaju-dom-spremni-Jasenovcu-kojima-smetaju-srpske-cokoladice>

¹³ “Predsednik Tomislav Nikolić, za ‘Novosti’: Nećemo dozvoliti EU da nas nišani kroz puškarnicu”, *Večernje novosti*, 14 December 2016, p. 2

Vučić's and Nikolić's reactions which placed Croatia's block on Chapter 26 as one among many incidents in the recent past, which all reflect the revival of Croatia's fascist tradition.¹⁴

2.1.3. Frame 3: Serbia between East and West

Večernje novosti and *Informer* also offered their audiences another, broader interpretation of the crisis. In accord with their pronounced anti-Western and pro-Russian editorial policies, they placed the crisis in the realm of East-West confrontation (a popular viewpoint among a large part of the Serbian public): Croatia's action represented the West's punishment for Serbia's friendly relations with Russia. *Večernje novosti* warned that it was time to "take off the rose-coloured glasses of illusion" and recognise two truths: that the "most powerful forces of the West" stand behind this "strong slap" given Serbia by Croatia, a mere member of a "European bush league", and that it is Russia which provides Serbia with "benefaction, friendly attention and gifts".¹⁵ *Informer* went further by stating that Croatia was worried primarily because it feared Russia would send MiG fighters to Belgrade as a consequence of the dispute.¹⁶

2.1.4. Frame 4: Serbia's government could have avoided the crisis

Danas was the only news source that assessed Croatia's action as partially justified (although overblown)¹⁷ and raised the issue of the Serbian government's responsibility and whether it made a mistake by ignoring the opposition parties' proposal to include the action plan for Chapter 26 and specify the steps to be taken to grant national minorities more educational rights. The opposition expected neighbouring countries to keep an eye on the treatment of their minorities in Serbia. The paper's coverage focused on the availability of textbooks in the Croatian language and the activities of state institutions in this regard. However, *Danas* did not go so far as to frame the crisis in terms of infringed rights of national minorities, choosing to stress the conflict between government and opposition in Parliament.

¹⁴ *Večernje novosti* cited Vučić saying that reading out "a list of all incidents in Croatia in the last year whose targets were the Serbs would take an hour and 20 minutes" and quoted his descriptions of Croatian officials as "those who treat partisans as terrorists and Ustashas as the army, those who are afraid of Serbian chocolate bars, those who build monuments to terrorists ..." Nikolić's quotes included a description of Croats as those who "break signs with Cyrillic letters, harass our citizens, put up (Ustasha) signs saying "Ready for the homeland" in Jasenovac" (the largest death camp for Serbs in the World War II state of Croatia). *Informer* emphasised Nikolić's statement that Croatia glorifies "symbols under which Serbs, Roma and Jews were killed in Hitler's creation, the NDH".

¹⁵ Commentary "Iluzija" (Illusion), *Večernje novosti*, 14 December 2016, p. 2

¹⁶ "Evo šta Hrvate svrbi! index.hr: pretnja iz Srbije – Rusi šalju 'migove' u Beograd zbog Hrvatske!" *Informer* online, 13 December 2016. Available at <http://informer.rs/vesti/politika/107985/EVO-STAHRVATE-SVRBI-Index-PRETNJA-SRBIJE-Rusi-salju-migove-Beograd-zbog-Hrvatske>

¹⁷ The subheading of an article on the front page called Croatia's actions "partially justified", while the inside story reported on the assessment of "diplomatic sources" that Croatia's stance was "justified, although exaggerated".

2.2. Scenarios for a resolution

Regardless of the different ways of framing the problem, the analysed media promoted or predicted similar short-term solutions to the crisis. None put the view that Serbia should strengthen the rights of the Croatian minority in order to end the dispute, while all, except *Blic*, in one way or another expressed the wish that the EU would pressure Croatia to change its decision.

Within Frame 1, *Blic* classed the dispute over Chapter 26 as just a storm in a teacup. The formal resolution of the episode did not matter, as long as Serbia was ready to reform itself “from within” in order to “belong to the society of European civilised nations”, as Vučić had promised. Within the same frame, RTS suggested that the crisis would be solved by the intervention of powers greater than Croatia, strong supporters of Serbia’s EU aspirations. Claims by Serbian officials that the preparations to negotiate Chapter 26 were “flawless”¹⁸ were accompanied by a series of statements by international actors such as the American ambassador to Serbia and vice-president, Germany’s ambassador and foreign minister and EU officials, who all praised Serbia for its integration achievements and suggested that the crisis would be solved after additional reconsiderations in favour of Serbia.

Večernje novosti and *Informer* presented an ambiguous solution within Frame 2. On one hand, both papers saw the answer in Serbian resistance to Croatia’s hostile act. They stressed the official message that Serbia would not permit itself to be degraded and walked on any longer¹⁹, although without indicating how this should be done. On the other hand, they promoted the message that Serbia did not want conflict and was in favour of talk and compromise. The silent expectation was that the EU should resolve the impasse by pressuring Croatia over its resistance to the will of the other member states.

Under Frame 3, *Večernje novosti* depicted Russia as a saviour that would stop Serbia’s humiliation, the West’s constant blackmail attempts and interference by Western ambassadors into the composition of Serbian governments. *Informer* directly promoted a military solution. It praised the Serbian military, with Russian help, as a long-term solution to Croatian harassment.

Finally, within Frame 4, *Danas* gathered a variety of perspectives on possible resolutions. Its interviewees concluded that the crisis would require Germany (specifically Chancellor Angela Merkel) to lean on Croatia to change its stance, as had already been the case when chapters 23 and 24 of the accession process were imminent.

The actual end of the crisis situation on 23 December – marked by Croatia withdrawing its block and the signing of the agreement with representatives of national minorities in Serbia – was reported in several ways. Except for *Danas*, the

¹⁸ As the minister of education told RTS. RTS *Dnevnik*, 14 December 2016

¹⁹ The headline of the *Informer* story read “Prime Minister Vučić has had enough: We are fed up with Croatian harassment, from now on we will talk in a different manner!”, while in *Večernje novosti* it was “We will not let them walk over us!”

coverage stuck with the initial framing and celebrated the event as a win for Serbia. *Danas* somewhat changed its outlook and emphasised the issue of national minority rights.

Večernje novosti reported the collapse of the Croatian blockade while mentioning the signing of the agreement only by the way, by quoting the Croatian foreign minister's statement welcoming the agreement.²⁰ The concession made by the Serbian side was diminished in two ways. First, it used quotes by the prime minister and the foreign minister that they were unaware of the reason behind Croatia's changed attitude. Second, the concession was ascribed to the Croatian side, as a result of pressure from Berlin and Washington, who needed the textbook agreement as "a necessary alibi to get out of a sticky position".

In its online edition, *Informer* reported the agreement in a short piece citing Croatia's foreign minister (23 December) and by using a detailed Tanjug report on the content of the agreement (24 December). The headlines, however, were clearly biased with the intention of discrediting the actions of the Croatian government.²¹ Neither article appeared in the print edition. The 24–25 December print edition did not mention the agreement at all. It reported that "although not a thing had been changed in the meantime", Croatia did change its decision, signifying a "new diplomatic victory for Serbia".²²

Blic and *Danas* clearly noted that Croatia unblocked the negotiations after Serbian institutions had signed the agreement on textbooks, but framed the event differently. *Blic* put it in the context of EU integration, with the subheading "Part of the problem on the road to the EU resolved",²³ while *Danas* stressed the issue of minority rights ("Annex signed to memorandum on textbooks for pupils schooled in minority languages").²⁴ *Blic* reported Vučić's ironic statement that he was grateful to Croatia for "stating our dramatic progress", while wondering what he had done in the past seven days to stimulate the change. *Danas* put the emphasis on the content of the agreement, mentioning how it affected the Croat and other minorities.

In one of its reports, RTS noted that Croatia had revised its decision even though the textbooks were not yet published and cultural goods (mentioned for the first time) not

²⁰ "Pala blokada iz Hrvatske!" (Croatian blockade collapses), *Večernje novosti*, 24 December 2016, p. 2

²¹ The headline of the first item read "They returned to their senses" ("Dozvali se pameti", available at <http://informer.rs/vesti/politika/109728/DOZVALI-PAMETI-Hrvatska-odblokiralapoglavlje-pregovorima-Srbije>) and of the second "This is what is actually written in the document that lifted the Croatian barrier to Chapter 26". Available at <http://informer.rs/vesti/politika/109831/EVO-STA-ZAISTA-PISE-dokumentu-koji-podigao-hrvatsku-rampu-poglavlje>

²² "Hrvati podvili rep" (Croats with their tails between their legs), *Informer*, 24–25 December 2016, p. 4

²³ "Hrvati nam odblokirali poglavlje 26" (Croats unblocks Chapter 26 for us), *Blic*, 24 December 2016, p. 5

²⁴ "Hrvatska odblokirala poglavlje 26" (Croatia unblocks Chapter 26), *Danas*, 24–25 December 2016, p. 6

returned. It quoted Croatian Foreign Minister praising the signing of the agreement as well as Vučić's ironic remark. However, RTS was the only source which at least implied that concessions were made by both Serbia and Croatia. It quoted a political expert that the shift was a result of a "diplomatic offensive from Washington, Berlin and Brussels, which offered an exit for both sides".²⁵

2.3. Problematic professional practices

The wide range of frames the media applied to the crisis, its actors, their motivations and potential solutions was matched by widely varying degrees of respect for standards of professional and responsible reporting.

Accuracy of reporting: The controversy over Chapter 26 formally ended on 17 January 2017 at the meeting of the Working Party on Enlargement when, as all media reported, Croatia and Bulgaria agreed to the opening of negotiations on the chapter. This shows that Bulgaria had not agreed to this at the previous meeting of this EU body the month before. However, all the analysed media singled out Croatia as the only dissenting voice. The source of this information was the prime minister, who belaboured it at his news conference after returning from Brussels.²⁶ Without consulting any other source, these media based much of their coverage of the crisis on a misrepresentation. None of them noted the previous inaccuracy in reports that month about Bulgaria giving its approval for the chapter opening.

Comprehensiveness of reporting: None of the analysed media provided clear and comprehensive explanations of Croatia's objections regarding the education and culture chapter. Vučić, the source of the most detailed comments on the topic, acknowledged Croatia's objections in connection to the position of the Croat minority mostly by trying to refute these objections and emphasising how much money Serbia had invested in the improvement of the position of the minority, such as funding Croatian-language media and modernising roads. In regard to education, he noted that some textbooks had already been published and that a contract to publish more had been signed with the minority authorities.

Večernje novosti and *Informer* foregrounded Vučić's view that there was no "coherent, logical or justifiable reason" for Croatia to block the negotiations.²⁷ The former only mentioned and the latter merely indicated the objections about the rights of the Croat minority. Neither mentioned the issue of textbooks specifically. *Blic* did not elaborate the reasons for Croatia's disagreement.

In contrast, RTS and *Danas* suggested that the controversy over Chapter 26 was related to the issue of education for the Croat minority, and textbooks in particular,

²⁵ RTS *Dnevnik*, 24 December 2016

²⁶ "Vučić specified that only one country had not consented to the opening of Chapter 26: It was the Republic of Croatia, he stressed categorically, rejecting some indications that other countries participated in stalling the chapter." *Informer*, 14 December 2016

²⁷ *Informer* cited Vučić saying "I really do not know what they want." *Informer*, 14 December 2016

and provided a number of details. However, no outlet mentioned that the debate over textbooks was at least 10 years old or that some progress had been made only in the last two years, nor that objections about the lack of textbooks in Croatian were expressed in the European Parliament in 2015, where the current Croatian Prime Minister once sat as a member.²⁸

Danas and *Blic* published short and highly selective reports on Vučić’s news conference. *Blic* omitted some of his remarks putting Croatia in a negative light and stressing the government’s measures to improve the position of the Croat minority. The report in *Danas* was even less comprehensive and less relevant; it omitted Vučić’s most important statements yet mentioned some bizarre details.²⁹

Additionally, none of the media outlets explained that a decision on the opening of negotiation chapters is a prerogative of each EU member country and that each has the full right to its exclusive opinion. They presented Croatia’s decision as a kind of a breach of European rules.

Table 2. Perspectives on the crisis

Media outlet	Sources/perspectives reported
RTS (8 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government (prime minister, president, vice prime minister, three ministers, two government officials) - Political parties (three opposition leaders, two ruling party leaders) - Minority representatives (president of the Croat minority council) - Croatia (president, foreign minister, ruling party MP, media, two political experts, former president) - International actors (two EU officials, U.S. vice-president, U.S. ambassador, German foreign minister, German ambassador)
<i>Danas</i> (9 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government (president, prime minister, two ministries, state textbook publisher) - Political parties (anonymous opposition MPs) - Minority representatives (president of Democratic Alliance of Croats of Vojvodina) - Experts (two NGO representatives, one international) - Croatia (president) - International actors (anonymous diplomatic sources)
<i>Večernje novosti</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government (president, prime minister)

²⁸ These points were made in an investigative article by the Voice agency. “Voice: I Srbija i HNV snose veliki deo krivice zbog blokade poglavlja 26”, available at <http://www.autonomija.info/voice-i-srbija-i-hnv-snose-veliki-deo-krivice-zbog-blokade-poglavlja-26.html>.

²⁹ Vučić was quoted as saying that the Serbian table of values was compatible with the values “promoted by philosopher (Friedrich) Nietzsche in *Zarathustra*” (“Vučić: Nismo napustili pregovore sa EU”, *Danas*, 14 December 2016, p. 3).

(12 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political parties (four opposition leaders, one ruling party leader) - Croatia (president, prime minister) - EU (Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn and EU Council presidency)
<i>Blic</i> (9 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government (president, prime minister, two ministers) - Political parties (one ruling party leader, one opposition leader) - Croatia (president, prime minister, president of the Parliament)
<i>Informer</i> (6 articles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government (prime minister, president) - Minority representatives (the Croatian Democratic Forum NGO) - Croatia (news website index.hr)

Diversity of reporting: The coverage in the semi-tabloid and tabloid press was characterised by a low diversity of views, while the reporting of *Danas* and RTS in particular was much more inclusive. The selection of voices implied a frame in which only Croatia was to be blamed for the crisis. In extreme cases, it was the European Union, hiding behind Croatia. Only *Danas* addressed the role of the Serbian government in the crisis.

Blic, *Večernje novosti* and *Informer* put Vučić's news conference centre-stage and ran commentaries as well as several short items on reactions to the crisis. Almost all these texts were produced according to a formula: one topic, one location, one actor/source, one opinion. Priority was given to the perspectives of the political elite. The coverage lacked expert views and relevant perspectives of the Croat minority, whose position and rights were at the core of the conflict.

All three dailies leaned towards pro-government views. These were reported in detail and quoted in the main headlines. The official position of Croatia was neglected, presented only briefly and in part.

Večernje novosti offered three different views of the problem – those of official Belgrade and Zagreb and of opponents to Serbia's EU accession. The accounts of Serbian officials were given clear privileged treatment. Croatia's stand was represented by its president, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, in three sentences. Serbia must fulfil the required criteria, she was quoted as saying, without specifying what these criteria were. Croatia's position was supported by the report of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, which urged Serbia to devote more attention to non-discriminatory treatment of national minorities. The third position was represented by a few sentences from three political party leaders who advocated putting a stop to the accession talks altogether.

Blic focused on conflicting opinions of Serbian and Croatian officials. No voices from the EU were presented, or the voices of anti-EU opinion. Such diversity of opinion as there was consisted of a one-sentence statement by the leader of the ruling coalition

party, who claimed that Croatia was not acting alone, because no one asks for its opinion in the EU.

Four out of the six *Informer* articles gave the most space to the government's views. The only voice from Croatia was a Croatian news portal (index.hr), which warned about the danger to Croatia if Serbia obtained warplanes from Russia. *Informer* did allow the Croat national minority to be heard. However, instead of an official statement from the National Council of the Croat Minority, which is in charge of minority education, *Informer* chose to present the views of an NGO, the Croatian Democratic Forum, which is known for its critical stance towards the National Council. This organisation also criticised the Croatian government and supported the position of the Serbian government.³⁰

RTS presented visuals of 27 participants in the Chapter 26 affair. All sides with a stake in the debate were given a voice, from opposition leaders to experts and Croat minority representatives. However, while the views of Croatians interviewed differed (some supported Croatia's stand, some did not, some considered it insignificant), the Serbian side was presented as uniform in criticising Croatia's position. RTS was the only outlet to quote the Croatian president's rejection of the "aggression rhetoric" coming from Serbia, insisting that there was no "Ustashism" in Croatia and seeing the accusations from Serbia as a sign that it was not willing to meet the required EU criteria.

Danas was the only outlet in the sample that did not put Prime Minister Vučić's interpretation of the crisis situation in the centre. It gave prominence to the views of the parliamentary opposition, but presented the positions of government institutions as well. Croatian views were under-represented. However, the daily got exclusive statements from EU diplomatic sources, the president of the Croat political party in Serbia and three experts. Contrary to its usual practice, it relied on anonymous sources from the opposition and EU diplomats in Brussels.

Impartiality and balance: None of the analysed media offered balanced reporting of the controversy. They all sided with one or another overall interpretation. The semi-tabloid and tabloid papers accepted and supported the official perspective. *Informer* reported only the views of Vučić, while *Večernje novosti* favoured the accounts of the crisis promoted by Vučić and Nikolić. *Blic* supported Vučić's pro-European agenda. The public broadcaster RTS skilfully supported the official point of view, among many opinions presented. None of these media put any part of the official stance into context. In contrast, *Danas* sided with critics of the government.

Differences in framing the problem can be attributed in part to the mixture of messages delivered by the primary news source, Vučić. *Blic* gave prominence to his statements that reaffirmed the continuation of the policy of EU integration and

³⁰ The Croatian Democratic Forum said the Croatian government used the "mantra about the problem of textbooks in the Croatian language" which was invented by the "self-elected leaders of the Croat community in Serbia", whose main interest is in lining their pockets. "Hrvati iz Subotice razočarani: Blokada Srbije nam nanosi ogromnu štetu!" (Croats from Subotica are disappointed: The blockade is causing us enormous damage), *Informer*, 13 December 2016. Available at <http://informer.rs/vesti/politika/108021/HRVATI-SUBOTICE-RAZOCARANI-Blokada-Srbije-nam-nanosi-ogromnu-stetu>.

omitted those that emphasised the conflict with EU member Croatia. *Večernje novosti* and *Informer* stressed parts of Vučić's speech that alleged Croatian hostility towards Serbia. In conjunction with their commentaries, these papers' news reports implied additional framing strategies closer to their pro-Russian and anti-Western editorial policies.

RTS mentioned many already available views from various sides, while on its own initiative presented only those perspectives which were in accord with the prime minister's position. These included special statements by the deputy prime minister, the ministers of education and of culture and information, the head of the Office for Human and Minority Rights and the president of the National Council of the Croat Minority.

Danas took an anti-government stance. Almost all of its texts were critical of the government and its actions. It confronted the government with a one-sided description of events taken from the parliamentary opposition and spoke of Vučić's sudden departure from Brussels as a "gesture directed at the Serbian public". It also discussed the consequences of the rising hostility between Croatia and Serbia and pointed out ambiguities in Serbian policy towards the EU and Russia.

Enterprise journalism: Except for RTS and *Danas*, the other media provided rather superficial coverage of the crisis situation. They did not undertake analytical, much less investigative reporting. The information they published was in most cases already available either in pre-organised events, in press releases or in other media.

Journalists for both RTS and *Danas* typically did original reporting and interviewed several sources. However, the initiative of RTS reporters mostly consisted in gluing a series of statements together, with little effort put into analytical insights. *Danas* was more analytical, although its decision not to name its sources from the parliamentary opposition and diplomatic circles was concerning.

Sensationalism: The reporting of *Informer* and *Večernje novosti* included elements of sensationalism. Several articles were written in highly emotional style. Headlines were provocative, with colloquial expressions and the use of exclamation marks, and carried messages which accentuated conflict and violence. Two prominent stories in *Večernje novosti* ran under the headlines "We will not let them walk over us!" and "We will not let the EU aim at us through a loophole".³¹ *Informer* used such headlines as "Prime Minister Vučić has had enough: We are fed up with Croatian harassment, from now on we will talk in a different manner!"³² and "This is what makes Croats

³¹ "Ne damo da nas gaze", "Nećemo dozvoliti EU da nas nišani kroz puškarnicu V. novosti", *Večernje novosti*, 14. December 2016. p. 2-3.

³² "Premijeru Vučiću prekipelo: Dosta nam je hrvatskog izjivljanja, od sada ćemo drugačije razgovarati!", *Informer*, 13. December 2016.
http://informer.rs/print/107831/vesti/politika/107831/PREMIJERU-VUCICU-PREKIPELO-Dosta-nam-Hrvatskog-izivljanja-sada-cemo-drugacije-razgovarati_

itch! Index.hr: A threat from Serbia – Russians sending MiGs to Belgrade on account of Croatia!”³³

The reporting could also be considered sensationalist in its one-sidedness and failure to provide key information necessary to an understanding of the crisis. Both dailies accentuated the antagonism between Croatia and Serbia, without explaining what the dispute was really about.

Discriminatory speech: Discriminatory speech was present in *Večernje novosti* and *Informer*. The main axis of the conflict was a distinction between “us” and “our country” and “them”. “They” were sometimes presented as Croatia, but many times as Croats, who were treated as a homogeneous group of people. The reporting strengthened negative stereotypes of Croatia’s government as a hostile, fascist-prone anti-Serb regime and of Croats (their only policy is “to be against Serbs and Serbia”, they are engaged in a contest to see “who will do greater harm to Serbia”, they are motivated by fear and cowardice) in opposition to “us”, who “do not hate anyone, do not want conflict, want to work and find compromise” but will stand up to those who take the contrary position.

2.4. Underlying causes of poor reporting practices

The mentioned failings of inaccurate and incomplete reporting, absence of diversity, partiality, superficial coverage, sensationalism and discriminatory language are indicators of the low quality of professional journalism in the analysed media. Standards have been declining in the profession for years (Matić, Valić Nedeljković 2014). According to Ljubica Marković, an experienced journalist and former editor-in-chief and director of the Beta news agency, the main causes of this trend are the highly unfavourable financial state of the media, abuse of public funds earmarked for the media and favouring of obedient media.³⁴

All of the analysed media suffer from financial hardship. RTS and *Večernje novosti* have huge debts. *Blic*, the product of the most successful company in the Serbian newspaper industry, fired 15 journalists in December 2016. *Danas* barely keeps its head out of the financial red. All their newsrooms are under-resourced. They lack funds to invest in human resources and allow journalists enough time and technical means to do high-quality stories – accurate, comprehensive, diverse, analytical and investigative. Journalists have heavy workloads.

Economic reasons, however, can only partly explain the specific editorial policies of the analysed media and the breaches of professional rules and ethics. RTS, for example, could use its status as a public service broadcaster and make itself a genuine voice of the public which finances it, if it had management dedicated to this goal and journalists who perceived themselves as serving the public rather than the

³³ “Evo šta Hrvate svrbi! Index.hr: Pretnja iz Srbije - Rusi šalju "migove" u Beograd zbog Hrvatske!”, *Informer*, 13.December 2016, <http://informer.rs/vesti/politika/107985/EVO-STA-HRVATE-SVRBI-Index-PRETNJA-SRBIJE-Rusi-salju-migove-Beograd-zbog-Hrvatske>.

³⁴ Interview with Ljubica Marković, Belgrade, 22 January 2017

government. Managers and journalists with these values were working at RTV, the public service broadcaster in the autonomous Vojvodina province, until a new SNS-led government took office in May 2016 and the management and several editors were replaced. According to Dubravka Valić Nedeljković, a professor in the media department of Novi Sad University, despite limited resources, in recent years the quality of journalism at RTV rose noticeably because journalists were allowed to work without pressure either from within or outside.³⁵ The new staff hired in 2016 had a clear political agenda, Valić says. The personnel reshuffle was the decision of the RTV governing board, whose members were appointed by the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, which has a track record of favouring the government. Political appointments of management and the chief editor of *Večernje novosti*, which is still partly state-owned, also help to explain its pro-government editorial policy.

Informer's background is particularly murky. It presents itself as a newspaper owned by journalists. However, its finances are completely non-transparent. There is a widespread belief in the journalism community that *Informer* was established in 2012 as a vehicle to promote the policies of the SNS, then fighting for victory in national elections. The daily has retained the same editorial policy ever since, now being financed from non-transparent government sources.

These observations strengthen the argument that editorial policies are partly a product of the dominant political culture, which understands the media as a political tool, and of a journalistic culture which equates the public interest with the government's interest.

Weak response to media failings by regulators and the public is another factor in the inadequate coverage of critical situations. Confronted by the enormous disrespect for ethical standards on a daily basis, the public has become desensitised to the pollution in the media sphere. The regulatory bodies are ineffective. The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media has never even tried to impose its authority over broadcasters or protect the public from unethical practices, or try to stimulate more diverse content. The only organisation that regularly monitors violations of professional ethics is a self-regulatory body, the Press Council. It oversees the content of the print media, and since 2016 of online media as well. It examines about 100 complaints annually from persons who believe they were damaged by a particular media report. Starting from 2016, council members have been able to submit complaints as well. Media outlets found to have broken an ethical rule are obliged to publish the decision of the Press Council. It began publishing its decisions on the council website in 2016.

During the past two years, the Press Council has monitored eight newspapers on a daily basis. While this has produced large amounts of material on the most common breaches of professional norms, this consuming activity prevents the council from paying attention to patterns of media behaviour in special situations that could have detrimental consequences for society, such as ethnic conflicts.

³⁵

Interview with Dubravka Valić Nedeljković, Belgrade, 20 January 2017

3. Conclusions

The media coverage of the controversy over Chapter 26 resembled a political campaign, journalist Ljubica Marković observed. The frames within which the sampled media outlets operated often turned their reports into accounts of a severe crisis, in most cases predominantly in favour of government interests, or, in the case of *Danas*, against them. In Marković's opinion, the media helped create an artificial crisis in relations with a neighbouring country and injected more heat into the situation according to the government's needs. The media failed to publish important information, such as the procedures for the opening of negotiation chapters and the experiences of other countries in the accession process, although this was probably relevant for understanding the position of Serbia.

This analysis demonstrates that the omission of significant facts, incomplete reporting, unbalanced presentation of opinions of opposing sides and failure to include other relevant actors in the story or dig beneath the surface all worked in favour of interpretations of the dispute in which only one set of views and arguments was given coherent meaning.

Except for *Danas*, a dominant pattern in the media treatment of the Serbia-Croatia tangle emerged from an ethnic perspective rather than a democratic one. News stories relied on confrontation with the ethnic enemy on the other side. In the narrative presented by the semi-tabloid and tabloid press, the crisis was about relations between "us" – always unnamed – and the adversary "other", a term which lumped the nation of Croatia and its officials under the label of "Croats". *Večernje novosti* and *Informer* led the way in reinforcing ethnic stereotypes. A similar pattern of mobilising national feelings by presenting Serbs as threatened by an ethnically homogenised enemy was widespread in the 1990s and served as the main mechanism for consolidating mass support for the policies of the state leadership. Hewing stubbornly to this ethnic perspective on the situation made the media unable to cover the dispute over Chapter 26 as a democratic issue, a story about the rights of a group of people, citizens of Serbia.

The semi-tabloid and tabloid dailies in no sense tried to act as a public forum both for constructive social dialogue on important questions and as a check on the government. The broadcaster RTS failed to pursue its public service remit, whether as a promoter of human rights and tolerance or facilitator in a process of seeking a resolution, achieved through democratic institutions on the basis of tolerance, that would satisfy all parties involved. *Danas* only partially fulfilled its role as facilitator of debate based on democratic principles. It did scrutinize the government, refrained from ethnic stereotyping and interviewed multiple sources. Initially, however, it focused on the internal political conflict instead of human rights, and it failed to produce authoritative reports or cite verifiable rather than anonymous sources.

Serbia is not alone in these practices. The official discourse in both countries serves to strengthen ethnic identity through confrontation and demarcation, portraying one's own ethnic group as the exclusive victim of the other. Former Croatian President Ivo Josipović has warned of the danger of a vicious circle arising in both countries, a culture of hatred where political elites stimulate ethnic strife for their own purposes,

aided by the media's ability to spread ideas among the public, while the people by their relation towards "the other" influence a further radicalisation of the political scene.³⁶

4. Recommendations

Serbia has a history of abuse of the media to incite ethnic hatred and help translate it into violent conflict. The main task for those who make decisions on media policies, media regulators and self-regulatory bodies, as well as media managers and editors who care about the integrity of the media, should be to prevent that history repeating itself. They should strive to ensure very high ethical standards in reporting on crisis situations, in particular those pertaining to ethnic relations, primarily by combating discriminatory reporting and the reinforcement of negative ethnic stereotypes.

Two kinds of action are needed: one to introduce more severe sanctions for breaches of professional ethics, and another to promote the benefits of ethical journalism.

- The institutions that are currently charged with regulating the media or specifically engaged in punishing breaches of ethical norms are not efficient in their work. Most of them work by reacting to complaints submitted by interested parties, which is a slow and inefficient process. These bodies should be given sufficient resources and authorised to undertake rigorous monitoring of media content and promotion of media integrity.
- The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, as the main oversight body for broadcasters, should first achieve independence from the government and the interests of big media owners. It should be allowed to use financial sanctions against violators of the law governing electronic media, which is in accord with journalism ethics in many regards.
- Journalism associations should revive the work of their "court of honour" and sanction their members who violate professional norms by depriving them of membership privileges or expelling them. These mechanisms stopped working long ago.
- The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality should disclose the full names of journalists and media that violate the anti-discrimination law. Currently, while reviewing complaints of discriminatory reporting and issuing decisions in the form of warnings, this body reveals only the first letter of the name of the media or journalist concerned.
- The Ministry of Culture and Information should adopt new guidelines for the work of committees that make decisions on co-financing grants,

³⁶ "Ivo Josipović: Region ponovo kao bure baruta", video interview, Danas online, 6 December 2016. Available at [http://52.169.190.13/politika.56.html?news_id=333611&title=Ivo+Josipovi%C4%87%3A+Region+ponovo+kao+bure+baruta+\(VIDEO\)#sthash.b1RVwm8Q.dpuf](http://52.169.190.13/politika.56.html?news_id=333611&title=Ivo+Josipovi%C4%87%3A+Region+ponovo+kao+bure+baruta+(VIDEO)#sthash.b1RVwm8Q.dpuf)

and ensure that decisions take into account applicants' past record of respecting the Journalists' Code of Ethics.

Journalism education needs to reflect on important lessons from recent history. For instance, the shameful history of war-mongering Balkan journalism in the 1990s is not taught in any Serbian journalism program. This topic should be introduced into courses on journalistic ethics and the history of journalism.

- Journalism students and young journalists should be taught to understand the consequences of unethical journalism.³⁷
- Appointment procedures and criteria for editors should be changed so that priority is given to applicants with a high professional reputation.
- Media workers should be more ethnically diverse. National media, the public service broadcaster RTS in particular, should hire professionals of different ethnic origin and promote them to positions as newscasters and reporters.
- Journalists should be offered training and courses about crisis reporting. More important, as pointed out by Milica Pešić, the executive director of the London-based Media Diversity Institute³⁸, such training should be given first of all to editors and managers.
- Training sessions and courses should use manuals published by the Media Diversity Institute on reporting diversity and reporting on particular issues such as ethnicity, religion and conflict, which are designed for specific geographical areas including south-eastern Europe.
- Journalism associations, the Press Council and other organisations with expertise in journalism training should offer training on these subjects and promote media ethics and integrity. Courses should include practical advice and the fruit of real-life experiences to aid reporters and editors understand why it is important to include a range of positions and avoid such practices as repeating insulting terms and expressions even when used by high officials.

Journalism educators and trainers should help journalists realise that, without abandoning professional standards of accuracy, impartiality and balance, they can play a part in fostering reconciliation and respect for ethnic differences, and promote intercultural dialogue rather than defending national interests as defined by the political establishment. Crises and conflicts are situations that bring up many challenges to carrying out this role, but they must not be allowed to disable it.

³⁷ Media editors surveyed by the Institute of Social Sciences about unethical practices singled out journalists' lack of understanding of the consequences of unethical journalism as the most important cause of the problem (Ignjatović 2006, p. 122). They next cited pressure from politicians and from media owners and management, along with the absence of meaningful sanctions, and finally ignorance of ethical rules.

³⁸ Interview with Milica Pešić, Belgrade, 28 January 2017

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List of interviewees

Zoran Lutovac, senior research fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade, 31 January 2017

Ljubica Marković, former editor and director of Beta news agency, Belgrade, 22 January 2017

Dubravka Valić Nedeljković, professor at Novi Sad University, Belgrade, 20 January 2017

Milica Pešić, executive director, Media Diversity Institute, Belgrade, 28 January 2017

Tamara Skrozza, member of the Press Council, Belgrade, 27 January 2017

Analysed articles and broadcast reports

Blic:

Mihailo Jovičević, “Usputna usporvanja”, 14 December 2016

“Vučić potvrdio da je Srbija otvorila dva nova pregovaračka poglavlja, Hrvatska nas neće ponižavati”, 14 December 2016

“Mihajlović: Blokada veći problem za EU”, 14 December 2016

“Nikolić: Mogli smo da sprečimo”, 14 December 2016

“Kitarović: Ista pravila za sve”, 14 December 2016

“Plenković: Nastavak pregovora”, 14 December 2016

“Petrov: Reakcija Srbije neprimerena”, 14 December 2016

“Marković: Hrvati se ništa ne pitaju”, 14 December 2016

“Jovanović: Evropska orijentacija”, 14 December 2016

“Rešen deo problema na putu ka EU: Hrvati nam odblokirali poglavlje 26”, 24 December 2016

Večernje novosti:

Predrag Vasiljević, “Iluzija”, 14 December 2016

“Predsednik Tomislav Nikolić, za ‘Novosti’: Nećemo dozvoliti EU da nas nišani kroz puškarnicu”, 14 December 2016

G.Č., “Zaključci Predsedništva EU o učinku naše zemlje: Zamerke oko manjina, pohvale za reforme”, 14 December 2016

P. Vasiljević, “Premijer Vučić o hrvaskoj blokadi poglavlja 26 i izazovima koji predstoje na putu ka EU: Ne damo da nas gaze”, 14 December 2016

“Grabar Kitarović: Znaju se kriterijumi”, 14 December 2016
G.Č., “Han: Srbije je na dobrom putu, želim što Vučić nije ostao”, 14 December 2016
“Šta Hrvatska traži”, 14 December 2016
“Durenje nije strategija”, 14 December 2016
“Dokle će nas blokirati”, 14 December 2016
“Predstava za građane”, 14 December 2016
“Odmah menajti državni kurs”, 14 December 2016
“Neprijateljska politika EU”, 14 December 2016
E.V.N., “Pala blokada iz Hrvatske”, 24 December 2016

Informer:

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