



Media and Information Literacy - Policies and Practices

Introduction to the research report –
Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Media and information literacy in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Numerous civil society initiatives and lack of public policies

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1. Introduction

Media and information literacy is still in its infancy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, primarily due to a failure by the public sector to invest substantial efforts in creating policies and mechanisms for its systemic development. In public policies in Bosnia-Herzegovina, media and information literacy has not yet been fully recognised as a key precondition for the democratisation of society. But, some strategic documents do mention certain concepts related to media and information literacy (hereinafter: MIL). Thus, strategic documents in the area of education underline the need to develop competences for access to information, critical thinking and use of information technology for participation in the community,¹ while the Policy for the Development of Information Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina (2017-2021) points to “a low level of digital literacy and skills”, noting the need to promote digital literacy and IT competences. In the Broadcasting Sector Policy (2006), on the other hand, media literacy is only mentioned as a key factor in reducing the risk of a digital divide.

However, the government's commitment to the development of MIL has not yet progressed from this formal recognition of its importance, and more concrete activities or strategic objectives to promote it remain undefined. Above all, the competent authorities have never adopted systemic solutions to integrate MIL objectives in the work of educational institutions. As a result, MIL remains very much underrepresented in the curricula of primary and secondary schools.² Formal syllabi provide an opportunity for students to get acquainted to some extent with various media forms and the basics of using new technologies, but what is missing in particular is an effort to help students develop the skills of critical thinking, understanding, critical analysis and production of media content. In teacher training, MIL-related topics are covered in a very limited number of classes of modest quality (Tajić 2013, 61-62).³ As a consequence, information literacy is still poorly developed

¹ Stimulating critical thinking, the skills of access to and use of information, and the use of information technology are, for example, mentioned as components of modern teaching in the Republika Srpska Strategy for the Development of Education for the period 2016-2021, while the 2014 Principles and Standards for Adult Education in BiH speak of “the ability of adults to understand and use media and other information ...” (p. 6). The document Strategic Thrusts of the Development of Education in Bosnia-Herzegovina for the period 2008-2015, accompanied by an implementation plan, notes the need to modernise the education process, including the promotion of critical thinking.

² In primary education, only around twenty classes are dedicated to topics related to media literacy, as part of the subjects of Mother Tongue, Fine Arts and IT. In secondary schools, MIL is taught as part of the subject Democracy and Human Rights, with two classes dedicated to freedom of expression and two to the role of the media in democracy (Tajić 2013, p. 58 and 59).

³ Some teacher academies have media literacy classes as part of language and pedagogy courses and/or the elective subject of Media Culture. Other teacher education programmes do not include the development of MIL to any significant extent (see e.g. Dedić Bukvić 2016, 73-96) but two journalism schools, for instance, offer Media Literacy as a subject.

among teaching staff, in particular when it comes to their ability to judge the reliability and quality of information (Vehab and Mavrak 2016).

Libraries for the most part do not have the capacities required to contribute to MIL, nor does this form part of their formal duties, although it is not unusual for university librarians to lecture on how to search for and use information. Archival and museology studies in the context of information and communication sciences do not exist (Vajzović et. al. 2018, 5).

Significant progress has, however, been made in the area of regulation of the broadcasting sector. The Communications Regulatory Agency of Bosnia-Herzegovina (CRA) was the first public institution to start using the term *media literacy*, some ten years ago. Since then, it has commissioned relevant studies, adopted rules, developed guidelines for broadcasting – primarily with a view to protecting minors and consumers⁴ – and organised events and campaigns.⁵ In September 2018, on the occasion of the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child in Bosnia-Herzegovina with UNICEF, CRA announced, among other things, that it would devote special attention to children content,⁶ whose broadcasting is obligatory for public radio and TV broadcasters.⁷ The regulator is also planning to carry out an awareness campaign on control of content to which minors are exposed; to publish a brochure on the protection of children and minors; and to carry out an analysis of the share, in term of quality and quantity, of children and educational programmes as well as of programmes intended for minorities and vulnerable populations and programmes adapted for disabled persons.⁸ CRA publishes information on radio and TV broadcasters as well as reports on breaches of professional standards, thus providing the public with an insight into media practices.⁹ In recent years, however, civil society organisations have emphasised the need to better regulate the

⁴ The Code on Audiovisual Media Services and Radio Media Services (2016) includes rules on the protection of identity of minors and the marking of content according to its suitability for minors (which have been in place since 2013). Guidelines on categories of content and an additional two studies have also been published (accessible at <https://www.rak.ba/bos/index.php?uid=1274081346>). In addition, the Code on Commercial Communications (2016) includes rules aimed at consumer protection, such as prohibition of covert advertising. The codes and rules are available on CRA's website: <https://www.rak.ba/bos/index.php?uid=1324649058>.

⁵ Current topics include online security; classification of content on online platforms such as YouTube; and adaptation of media and telecommunication services to disabled persons. Since 2011, CRA has taken part in the organisation of Safer Internet Days in cooperation with the Ministry of Security of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Save the Children, and many others. In 2018, CRA also held a workshop for journalists and for employees of telecom companies on adaptation of technology and services for disabled persons. Source: Lea Čengić Tajić, interview of 20 September 2018.

⁶ Predrag Kovač, CRA director, in a report published on the platform For Every Child, 13 September 2018. Available at <http://www.zasvakodijete.ba/djeca-u-medijskom-okruzenju-unicef-bih-i-regulatorna-agencija-za-komunikacije-rak-potpisali-memorandum-o-zastiti-i-promociji-prava-djeteta-u-bih/>.

⁷ Public TV stations in Bosnia-Herzegovina are obliged to have a minimum 6% share of children programmes per week, while the share of children content on public radio stations has to be 4% per week (Rule 77/2015, Article 29, Paragraph 2; Rule 76/2015, Article 28, Paragraph 2).

⁸ Source: Lea Čengić Tajić, CRA, interview of 10 September 2018.

⁹ The CRA annual reports on breaches of the rules, as well as the contact information and names of the directors and editors-in-chief of the broadcasters, are available on CRA's website: <https://www.rak.ba/bos/index.php?uid=1272548169>.

transparency of media ownership and financing.¹⁰ Through the regulation of radio and TV content (managed by CRA), and the self-regulation of online and print media (with the oversight of the Press Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina), the professional standards to be adhered to by the media have been established. The system is based on citizen complaints regarding media content, with CRA carrying out partial monitoring of content from time to time.¹¹ The number of complaints received by the Press Council annually grew from a two-digit figure in the early 2000s to between 200 and 300 over the past five years, which might indicate improved public awareness of the complaint procedure. It is also commendable that, unlike CRA, the Press Council explains the complaint procedure in a visible place on its homepage. Still, without additional efforts to develop MIL skills among Bosnian citizens, the potential of these mechanisms, as well as that of active citizen participation in communication processes in general, remains largely unused.

Momentum for CRA's significant engagement in this field has been provided by the great importance that international audiovisual policy standards attach to the active role of regulators in encouraging MIL.¹² Nevertheless, its example has not been followed by other public bodies despite international recommendations for EU member states to, among other things, launch a debate on the integration of media literacy in curricula, to support systematic research, and to develop, through training and information, an awareness of European audiovisual heritage and of the online management of personal data (European Commission 2009).

Although, in contrast with EU member states,¹³ the public sector in Bosnia-Herzegovina is not active in this field, some institutions do undertake isolated activities. An important example is the current initiative of the Ministry of Communications and Transport of Republika Srpska (RS), launched in cooperation with the RS Ministry of Education and Culture, the Pedagogical Institute and the public broadcaster Radio-Television of Republika Srpska, whose key element is an awareness campaign on new technologies and potentially harmful content (violence, advertisements, stereotypes, pornography) and regulation and self-regulation (strategies and laws, codes of ethics for the media and advertisers). The campaign will target pupils in the seventh grade of several primary schools, as well as their teachers and parents, in the school year 2018/2019. This is a significant initiative launched without dedicated funds thanks to the enthusiasm of individual Ministry staff.¹⁴ However, this type of action can have but a limited effect in the absence of comprehensive public policies. A step towards the development of such policies is the recently articulated intention to draw up a media literacy strategy.

¹⁰ On one of these initiatives, see more on the website of Mediacentar Sarajevo: <http://media.ba/bs/vijesti-i-dogadaji-vijesti/potrebni-zakoni-o-medijskom-vlasnistvu-i-finansiranju-medija-u-bih>.

¹¹ CRA can issue warnings, impose fines, and suspend or revoke broadcasting licences, while the Press Council operates based on self-regulation, that is, the willingness of the media to work in line with Council decisions and to delete or correct problematic content.

¹² See above all the AVMS Directive 2010/13/EU, as well as the European Commission Recommendations (2009/625/EC).

¹³ In the EU, a total of 939 key players in the area of MIL have been identified, of which 175 from public institutions and 161 from academia. For more, see European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016.

¹⁴ For instance, the activities of the Data Protection Agency focus on the protection of minors. During the school year 2017/2018, presentations were given to an audience of sixth graders in 27 primary schools around Bosnia-Herzegovina on how to protect oneself from abuse of personal data on the Internet. Source: Una Kurtić Demir, Data Protection Agency, meeting of 10 August 2018. The RS Ministry of Education and Culture is working to supply primary schools in the RS with laptops, network equipment and software.

Following a UNESCO proposal,¹⁵ the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia-Herzegovina has decided to produce a state-level strategy for the development of MIL. But no concrete activities have been undertaken in this regard so far; the primary reason given is that this is the last year of the current government's term in office.¹⁶ At the moment, it is not possible to confirm whether the new government that will emerge from the October 2018 elections will demonstrate a willingness to develop this strategic document.

For the time being, there is still a lack of will and capacities for a broader and more substantial engagement. Still, given the great importance attached to media literacy over the past few years in the context of EU activities,¹⁷ but also the significant emphasis placed on these issues by civil society, public bodies, too, will have to take action in this area sooner or later in order to demonstrate their own democratic credibility. MIL is examined in the context of EU accession, primarily in Chapter 10 (Information Society and the Media), which lists the EU *acquis* that candidate countries commit themselves to take over, including the European Commission media literacy recommendations of 2009 (2009/625/EC). Amira Lazović, head of the Legal Approximation Department at the EU Integration Directorate, believes that what is missing in the accession process is primarily a plan of legislative approximation, “whereby such a document would allow us to know the timeline to transpose a certain directive that is directly or indirectly linked to media and information literacy” and whereby coordinated and strategic action of different competent institutions would be ensured.¹⁸

1.1. Obstacles to developing systemic solutions

The key obstacle to initiatives to develop MIL policies in the public sector is the complexity of the administrative structure of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with its fragmented, overlapping and insufficient responsibilities in the areas relevant to MIL. Initiatives to develop comprehensive policies will inevitably be confronted with the complex system of responsibilities but also with the lack of political will for cooperation and coordination. This is particularly the case in the education sector, where the responsibilities are divided between 14 ministries (the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, entity education ministries, Brčko District Education Department, and the ten cantonal ministries in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina).¹⁹

¹⁵ Under the 2017-2019 project “Building Trust in the Media in Southeast Europe and Turkey”, funded by the EU and UNESCO.

¹⁶ The working group to develop the strategy should include members nominated by the entity ministries as well as representatives of the broader public and expert community (civil society, media, experts for education, media, information society, library science). Source: Amira Redžić, Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, meeting of 27 September 2018.

¹⁷ The European Commission conclusions and recommendations go in the direction of monitoring of media literacy, supporting research in this area and encouraging member states to take necessary measures to promote media literacy (see for example, European Commission 2009, the Council of the EU 2009). On 25 June 2018, the European Commission launched the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans with a view to providing support for transition towards digital economy and to fostering services, economic growth and development of the labour market (for more, see the communication: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-4242_en.htm).

¹⁸ Meeting of 16 October 2018.

¹⁹ The RS Ministry of Education has the primary responsibility for all levels of education in the territory of the RS, while the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina are mostly limited to coordination between the ten cantonal ministries. Similarly, the

Nor have we seen examples of any significant integration of the MIL concept in the curricula in individual administrative units, which can be primarily ascribed to the lack of resources and lack of interest on the part of decision-makers.

1.2. Contribution of the IT and civil sectors to MIL development

The ICT sector and civil society organisations are in part contributing to the development of MIL in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Telecom and IT companies organise occasional training courses, mainly aimed at developing IT skills, while civil society organisations are the most active in promoting critical thinking and media production skills. Civil society organisations have actually been the only sector in Bosnia-Herzegovina so far that has actively worked to develop and implement different educational programmes and research and to raise awareness in this field. Through its efforts over a number of years, the civil sector has developed MIL skills among different target groups, raised public awareness of current policies and trends in this area, and developed significant resources that can serve as the basis for future action.

However, we should also note the constraints resulting primarily from the lack of a comprehensive overview of past initiatives and resources, due to which it is difficult to lay the foundations for solid future work. Accordingly, there exists a need to summarise and synthesise past experiences and to make the available resources readily accessible, not only in order to improve the work of the civil sector but also, with a view to the future, to allow the public sector to use in its future MIL initiatives the resources and knowledge developed through the long-standing efforts of civil society organisations in this field.

1.3. Thematic focus of the country research: Position and prospects of the civil sector in MIL development

The research report in the next chapters focuses on analysing the work of the civil sector in Bosnia-Herzegovina as regards the development of media and information literacy. In doing so, it seeks to present and analyse the focus and type of engagement of civil society organisations; resources that have already been developed as well as those that are still necessary; cooperation and exchange with the public and media sectors; as well as the prospects for future action in this area.

The report is based on qualitative research that included a survey carried out in the period August-October 2018; semi-structured in-depth interviews with experts (six published interviews); questionnaires filled out by representatives of the civil sector (five questionnaires filled out of the 12 sent out); additional e-mail communication (with three respondents); insights from meetings with representatives of the public sector (four meetings) and civil society organisations (one online meeting); as well as an analysis of secondary sources on MIL in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the region, and EU member states. Due to the small sample, the findings and conclusions are not representative of all the players and features of this field in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but the respondents do include the key players in the area of MIL and related fields, which allows for insights into some of the important patterns of action.

responsibilities for legislative changes in the education sector are held by the parliaments at state level, in the two entities and in Brčko District and the ten cantons.