

INDICATOR 3: THE MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE

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SUMMARY

In this section we study the elements that influence the construction of the media as a platform of democratic discourse in Croatia, based on UNESCO's indicators for the development of democratic media. Democratic discourse assumes a specific way of organization of the media and a specific use of the media in the process of receiving, production and distribution of information and other symbolic media content. Democratic structure of the media space is a civilisational value for which there is no alternative in the modern international community, and it is based on international and national media policy and legislation, professional self-regulation and a participatory public. Croatia, as a candidate for the European Union, accepts the international standards and includes them in its laws and regulations, but has its own specific history of political and democratic development, and in this context, we investigate the achieved level of democratic media culture. This indicator encompasses the analysis of the following: a) how and to what extent media organizations reflect social diversity, b) a model of public service; c) the effectiveness of self-regulation; d) demands for justice and impartiality; (e) the degree of confidence that the public expresses towards the media; (f) the safety of journalists. The research results are as follows: A) To a certain degree, Croatian media organizations uphold social diversity through the representation of national minorities in the programs of public television and radio, the presence of the language of national minorities in the media, and the employment of minority groups following gender and ethnicity. In Croatia, there are 22 national minorities, which make up 7.5 percent of the population. According to the law which governs HRT, Croatian Radio and Television is obliged to produce and/or air programs intended to inform members of national minorities in Croatia. Practice shows that for now, about 1% of programs on the radio are produced for national minorities, and public television has only one specialised program, presenting reports to minorities within the overall program. About fifty newspapers for national minorities in Croatia are financed from the national budget. The indicator of employment shows that the public broadcaster employs about 20% more men than women, and women are more likely than men to perform jobs in radio and TV programs, and less in editorial positions. Research is lacking for more detailed findings. B) Indicators of the Croatian public service show that through the Law regarding HRT from 2003, European standards for democratic practices at the level of legislation, self-regulation and other rules were adopted. By law, public radio and television is guaranteed independence, no influence of politics, and technical potential. Its work is the responsibility of its founder - the Croatian Parliament, rather, the public through the HRT Council which is elected from the ranks of civil organizations and the public. However, only the politicians, or rather the party which is in power, decide who will be chosen for the Council, which then appoints the directors and editors, and which then the public service again returns to the jurisdiction of politics. C) Self-regulation of the Croatian media space is explored in the framework of formal and practical achievements. At the formal level, it can be argued that at the level of the journalistic profession there exists an umbrella association, a code of ethics, and a body to monitor the implementation of the code. However, in practice, there are great problems in the effectiveness of self-regulation within the existing Croatian public and commercial media. Dialogue is missing between the journalist profession, media owners and the authorities, resulting in the fact that most media have not accepted the collective agreements. Mechanisms for the suppression of violations of workers' rights and freedoms of journalists, such as an

Ombudsman Institute, are not developed. D) Like the majority of national governments, through its legislation, the adoption of realized European standards of media policy based on the activities of institutions such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission, UNESCO and other countries, Croatia incorporated the requirements of fairness and impartiality that are based on the recommendations and the positive experience of the international community and measures to be taken in the pre-election advertising into its media and other laws. Research is not numerous, but that which has been conducted does not indicate that there are large discrepancies between the media laws and media practice. E) In Croatia, the level of public confidence in the media is lower than in many countries in Europe: 35% of Croatian citizens believe in the integrity and the quality of the media and 54% have no confidence in the media. F) The safety and security of journalists are important indicators of the democracy of the media landscape. In the Croatian media landscape, during the last decade journalists were exceptionally unsafe, especially journalists in investigative reporting who wrote about political corruption and economic crime. This situation has led to great uncertainty of journalists and self-censorship. The Croatian Journalists' Association and The Society of Investigative Reporters of the Association in 2008 released a document entitled "White Book" which is a chronology of the attacks on journalists in Croatia from 1992 – 2008, and where the names of more than 40 journalists are cited who were attacked in various ways. Based on the conducted research of indicators, it can be concluded that through legislation, the media in Croatia have adopted the basic requirements for the construction of the media as a platform of democratic discourse. However, self-regulation and media practice can still be improved in many segments towards the direction of this goal. Media politics at the level of state activity in the insurance of legislation and regulations has a fundamentally conformed relationship with international standards, but there is a possibility of political control over media. Media practice at the level of law enforcement in media organizations and through professional activities, and self-regulation of the profession, generally is not on par with international standards of freedom, security and independence of journalists. The public and civil society does not show interest and is not motivated to participate in creating a democratic space with developed media neither through efficient supervision of the implementation of media laws nor through organizing initiatives or strategies.