



2018

# REAL VOICE OF JOURNALISM

REPORT ON THE STATE OF MEDIA FREEDOM IN 17  
LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



POST-  
CONFLICT  
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CENTER

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# **REAL VOICE OF JOURNALISM**

## **Report on the state of media freedom in 17 local BiH communities**

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# Introduction

Local media play a pivotal role in every community. Media outlets should serve as a link between the local community and the wider public and act as means of communication between municipalities or cantons and their citizens. But is this the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and is such a situation even possible when media are exposed to constant political and financial pressures?

This research has detected dozens of problems that professional journalists in local communities must face. Some of the problems are common to all journalists, regardless of where they work, but some of the problems are specific to journalists in local BiH communities. One of the main obstacles for the local BiH media is their financial dependence on the local authorities and political centers of power that threaten their financial sustainability. Beyond this, there is the problem of censorship, which prevents the media from doing everyday assignments in a professional manner. In BiH, almost every canton and municipality have their own local radio and TV stations, which are partially financed by local budgets. There are also hundreds of private radio and TV stations operating at the local level. The majority of them are politically or financially dependent, thanks to either the government or the owners of large companies.

Financial dependence is one of the primary causes of the public media's editorial dependence. Studies have shown that editorial independence is very hard to achieve in media houses that are directly financed by cantonal and municipal budgets. Elections and the replacement of public media directors and editors are both directly influenced by local and cantonal authorities, and the results often reflect these authorities' political interests. Journalists face enormous direct and indirect pressures, whether political, economic, or threats issued in the real and virtual world. These pressures are often magnified for journalists in local communities as the local authorities are governing such communities. The lack of resources (namely financial) that inhibit serious investigative journalism, an inability to advance within the work place, limited choice of interviewees, not obeying the Law on Access to Information (or, as the journalists say, "the closed doors for journalistic microphone"), are just some of the problems this research addresses.

Journalists state that the most difficult topics to report on at the local level are corruption, nepotism, and stories about post-conflict society, while topics related to economy, everyday life, sports, and culture are much easier. The biggest problem journalists encounter is censorship, which includes self-censorship. No matter the challenges they are facing, it is obvious that journalists in local communities are often left to their own devices, and the solidarity among colleagues is often non-existent. This research also indicates that current laws, which are deemed appropriate, are not being properly enforced, which presents additional problems for professional journalists in BiH.

The main goal of this research, which draws upon interviews with 30 journalists from 17 local BiH communities, is to identify the most significant problems encountered by local reporters and to present potential solutions.

# 1. The life of a local reporter in BiH

***Media freedom constitutes an important index for democracy, political freedoms, and the rule of law in a country or region. Any attack on the media and journalists is an attack on a democratic society.<sup>1</sup>***

According to a 2017 report on media freedom by Freedom House, BiH is ranked amongst the seven worst countries in Europe, with a score of 51/100, giving it the same score as Albania. According to this report, BiH is ranked lower than its neighbors Croatia and Serbia.<sup>2</sup> The media sustainability index for 2017 states that ethical reporting is being neglected in BiH, and that reporters are not following professional standards. Journalism as a profession is underappreciated by the public, and the typically low and late wages lead to political pressures and self-censorship.<sup>3</sup> It is especially hard for the reporters that work in the local communities and for local media houses. They must face economic pressures, extremely low wages, and ever-increasing political pressures, as the majority of media are financed from local budgets under the control of major political parties.

## 1.1. One day as a local reporter

When explaining what it's like to work in local communities, most of our interviewees note a difference between covering "everyday" versus "exceptional" topics. Under the everyday topics, they include cultural and sporting events, press conferences, and local matters. The research also reveals that the most common challenges for these reporters include the editorial policy (which is often under the heavy political influence) and the problem of censorship.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe, Resolution 2035 (2015), Protection of the safety of journalists and of media freedom in Europe

<sup>2</sup> Freedom House. Freedom of the Press 2017: Press Freedom's Dark Horizon

<sup>3</sup> IREX Media Sustainability Index <https://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi> (20.3.2018.)

*“The things that bother me the most are the stories that have nothing to do with the everyday life and the problems of people in local communities. The news is being ‘produced’ in favor of the governing structures and should show to us how everything is great and everybody is happy. There is a lot of censorship and any attempt to present an alternative opinion is being censored,”* states a journalist from Višegrad who wanted to remain anonymous.<sup>4</sup>

A reporter from Zenica agrees with his colleague from Višegrad and states that a typical day at the office in RTV Zenica starts with the assigning of tasks, which includes orders from the city's administration. He says that censorship is a common problem when reporters decide to talk about things that are not assigned to them. *“It is a common for an editor to reject a topic presented to them by a reporter for no apparent reason, when the real reason is that the topic is not favorable to a director who is under the influence of the city's administration... Stray dogs, holes on the road, the poor road conditions in general. If you report about such topics, it ‘downgrades’ the city’s image and drives the investors away.’ On the other hand, anything that is favorable to the mayor's election campaign is good to go,”* states this reporter who also wanted to remain anonymous.<sup>5</sup>

Another challenge faced by reporters from the local community is finding relevant and responsible speakers for topics of concern to the local community.

*“There are no everyday events in Srebrenica that can be followed by the media. As a result, the reporters from the smaller places are limited with information. Even though it is the truth that Srebrenica, regarding to the smaller places, is being explored the most, but still there are not enough topics for an everyday research,”* says Sadik Salimović, a reporter from Srebrenica.<sup>6</sup>

Alen Bajramović, a reporter from Goražde, thinks that *“one problem that stands out among everyday problems, especially in the last couple of years, is the increasingly difficult cooperation of speakers who have information or personal experiences about*

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<sup>4</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*the bad things that are happening in the society, especially when those bad things are initiated by the government.”*<sup>7</sup>

Azra Bajrić, a reporter for RTV Cazin has a similar attitude. She describes working in local media as doing “a bit of everything,” because it often includes doing various activities throughout the day, from leading the informative program, to reading the news, to the production of advertisements and commercials. She also says that she looks forward to working in the field *“among ordinary people in the smaller communities, where the people's destinies and life stories often carry important messages, point to bigger problems, and reveal solutions to these problems.”* She also stated, however, that she rarely has the time to work in the field because of her role on the editorial staff.<sup>8</sup>

Harun Bošnjak, a reporter from Zenica, states that one of the obstacles he faces in his everyday work is the lack of technology. He also remarks that, as a reporter, he most enjoys reporting on positive stories, such as new initiatives and companies that are benefitting the Bosnian economy.<sup>9</sup>

## **1.2. Do we trust the media?**

The challenges of finding appropriate speakers and maintaining people's interest in the media's work are closely connected with the level of trust in the media that those people have. According to research on public opinion conducted in 2017 by “BH Journalists”, BiH citizens place the same amount of trust in the media as they do in religious communities.<sup>10</sup> In a 2000 analysis of media development in BiH, it is explained that in BiH, historically speaking, citizens do not have much reason to trust the media. This was primarily the result of living in Yugoslavia and during the nationalistic period, which followed the breakdown of the state. The political manipulation of the media for

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<sup>7</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>10</sup> BH Novinari. Građani BiH najviše vjeruju medijima, najmanje političarima <https://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2018/05/03/4294/> (3.5.2018.)

the propaganda purposes during the war has damaged the public's perception of media content. During the war, the media served as a tool for political leaders and as an outlet for military propaganda. The main result of this propaganda is that citizens in BiH do not trust the politically motivated media or the newly formed independent media.<sup>11</sup>

One of the more common challenges faced by media makers is the literacy of citizens. We define media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in different forms and shapes.

*"It is safe to say that the majority of the BiH is not capable of critically consuming the information. I still believe that many people understand the information, but they are either pragmatic or scared and then lean toward to the opinions formulated by the government. This can be associated as a consequence of an undeveloped democracy and the legacy of a socialist system,"* says Erduan Katana, a reporter from Banja Luka.<sup>12</sup>

The data from a regional 2017 report on media literacy and the educational needs of reporters and the public reveals similar conclusions: *"the ethnic and religious origin of the citizens and their loyalty towards certain political and cultural attitudes is leading them to seek out information that confirms their opinions, rather than to use the media as a source to discover new perspectives."*<sup>13</sup>

Reporters attribute the lack of critical thinking when interpreting the news to citizens' political affiliations.

Milorad Milojević, a journalist from Banja Luka, thinks that only a small number of citizens are capable of critically and objectively processing the information presented to them by the media. *"I often film polls and work with citizens and one thing that caught*

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<sup>11</sup> Maureen Taylor and Philip M. Napoli (2000), Media Development in Bosnia: A Longitudinal Analysis of Citizen Perceptions of News Media Realism, Importance and Credibility. Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies, 2003 Sage Publications London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi, Vol 65(6): 473–492

<sup>12</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>13</sup> South-East European Partnership for Media Development. Media Literacy and Education Needs of Journalists and the Public in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia - Regional Report. March 2017

*my attention is how easily people tend to be influenced by politics... It seems that some of us have not moved far from the war trenches.”<sup>14</sup>*

Several of our speakers have connected media literacy with the education of the citizens, given the way they tend to process information that they are given. Mirsad Behrem, a journalist from Mostar, confirms this statement: *“During the prosecution of a local mobster for human trafficking, I was stopped in the streets by an angry man who said that this country is not just because the newspaper stated that the mobster is not guilty... As it turns out, the reporter had just stated the allegations from the indictment in the article and had quoted a statement from the mobster’s lawyer, who had said that his client was innocent. In conclusion, the ‘average’ BiH citizen has no idea what an indictment, a defensive stance, or a judgment is.”<sup>15</sup>*

The situation is similar when it comes to the relationship between media literacy and the objectivity of the media themselves. According to the data of the Regulatory Agency for Communications, the number of active (traditional) media outlets in BiH is 386, including 10 daily newspapers, 189 other kinds of print media, 144 radio stations, and 43 TV stations.<sup>16</sup> Accurate statistics regarding the number of online media portals is not available. In addition to ordinary citizens, journalists also have a problem trusting the media. The majority of them think that the politicization of the media through financial dependency is the biggest obstacle to objective and unbiased journalism.

*“There are media that work in accordance with journalistic standards, but there are also those who are under the influence of the political parties and who work in accordance with their interests. Those media base their reports on less truthful facts and focus more on praising the parties they represent as well as on campaigning against their enemies. At the core of the media's independence is financial independence, which is rare today,”* says Gojko Veselinović, a journalist from Banja Luka.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Regulatorna agencija za komunikacije (RAK) <https://www.rak.ba/bos/> (15.3.2018.)

<sup>17</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

Maja Nikolić from Tuzla adds that, *“the truth is definitely there and the people in BiH appreciate it. I speak from my personal and journalistic experience. I do believe that we still have media that tell the factual truth. There are only a few such media, but they do exist.”*<sup>18</sup>

When asked to list their most trusted media sources, our interviewees emphasized Radio Free Europe, N1 TV, Al Jazeera Balkans, and the reports published by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN BiH). When asked to give a list of media most influenced by the government, our interviewees mentioned Radio Television of Republika Srpska (RTRS), Federal Television (FTV), and Radio Television of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BHRT), among others.

### **1.3. Mutual cooperation and relations**

Considering that the most trusted media outlets are those financed by international donors and companies, it is no surprise that the majority of our interviewees have said that their best work experiences were those with colleagues from the other parts of the world and on international projects.

Aid Mršić, a journalist from TV SA, states that the major advantages of working on international projects versus working in BiH are time and resources: *“In our country, we do not have time for research. Resources are limited. Everyone wants a subject to be researched and finalized on the same day, which is not good for the journalists. Considering the fact that we work on everything, including the daily politics, economy... sometimes it is really hard to complete the story.”*<sup>19</sup>

Dalibor Tanić, another reporter from Sarajevo, stated that the advantages of working on international projects are financial resources, but also emphasized the professional

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<sup>18</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

relationships that exist within the business. He shared one of his experiences working with the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*:

*“They were disgusted by the fact that they had to pay 100 euros for an interview with a guy from Goražde. The guy asked for 100 euros in order to talk with them. They were having none of that, and after consulting with the editor, they gave up on the story and returned home with one story less. They have told me that this had nothing to do with the money, but it is rather a matter of principle.”<sup>20</sup>*

A significant number of interviewees did not have an opportunity to work with colleagues outside of BiH or the Western Balkans, but all of them have stated that they wish to do so in the future.

When asked about their everyday jobs in the multiethnic conditions, most of our interlocutors agreed that working with people from different ethnic groups was not a problem at all, as long as the job was done according to the ethical principles of journalism.

Arnes Grabešić, a journalist from Doboj, emphasized: *“I work with reporters from Doboj that are a different nationality than me. Even though we have different political views, especially those in relation to war, that doesn’t stop us from working together.”<sup>21</sup>*

Edin Skokić, a journalist from Tuzla, agreed with Arnes: *“I have worked with colleagues of a different ethnicity when I was working for “Nezavisne novine” The majority of them were Serbs and I never had a single problem. Unfortunately, I have a feeling that the media scene in BiH has become more polarized in the last few years.”<sup>22</sup>*

On the other hand, working with colleagues who are members of a political party often does create problems in the workplace, especially for the reporters who do not work as freelancers or maintain working relationships with a particular media outlet. These

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<sup>20</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

problems vary from simple misunderstandings and different opinions to complete control and political pressure.

Nusret Smajlović, a journalist from Radio Ritam Visoko, believes that the job of a journalist should have nothing to do with politics, meaning that reporters should not be associated with any political party in any way: *“We can take as a local example some of Radio Television Visoko’s reporters, with whom I have often had the opportunity to be in the field and work with, who do not have the ability to conduct objective reporting. It was often the case that they reported on the same events very differently than I did. The main cause of this was politics.”*<sup>23</sup>

Dalibor Tanić shares another example in reference to the time he spent working for the faktor.ba portal: *“I was trying to suggest some topics several time, and was persuaded by the editors that I wasn’t capable of writing about them in the proper manner. For example, one of the topics that I suggested was to cover the work of the Help Fund for those endangered by the 2014 floods. Of course, that fund never covered what it was supposed to and I was given information in advance that money had been spent on something else, but if you look into who the founder and president of that fund was, you would understand why I was never approved to cover that topic.”*<sup>24</sup>

Selma Tahirović from Sarajevo reveals that there are major problems related to editorial policies at the media outlet where she works as an editor. *“Editorial policy is governed by the executive (member of the SDA party) himself. He edits all the programs. We, as editors are forbidden to interfere with certain subjects and with his decisions. As the main editor, I have a difficult time giving my journalists tasks if I do not personally agree with the projects.”*<sup>25</sup>

The everyday job of journalists in local communities is far from ideal. Even though the work of reporters in local communities seems more straightforward on paper (due to the fewer number of topics covered and the fact that it is easier to cover smaller areas),

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<sup>23</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

reporters are often unable to report about common, everyday problems unless the topic is in accordance with the editorial policy of the media outlet in question. The most common challenges facing the everyday work of journalists in local communities are strict editorial policies that restrict their freedom to report on various topics and the attitude of citizens towards the media. Truth as one of the main principles of ethical journalism is at stake and is often found in many forms – namely in accordance to the political party that governs the community.

## 2. The Challenges of Reporting at the Local Level

*When in a society fear and self-censorship take the place of freedom to criticize and investigate, democracy is undeniably ailing. The freedom and safety of journalists are also our freedom and our safety.<sup>26</sup>*

### 2.1. Political and financial pressures

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.”<sup>27</sup> This Declaration, proclaimed in 1948, laid the foundations for the work of the media today and still demands the respect of freedom of speech in every form.

The interviewees involved in this research have stated that the main challenge when working at the local level is the constant influence of politics, which often leads to censorship and self-censorship.

*“One of the challenges for all of us is definitely self-censorship. Self-censorship is talked about a lot less than censorship. It has happened, and I speak for myself that even before we start to write a story on paper, we give up, because we know that our potential interviewees are “tough,” or are hard to reach because they come from a certain political party,”* says Dalibor Tanić.<sup>28</sup>

*“The main challenges are connected with the question of how to preserve the independence of a journalist so that you do not fall under the influence of any kind of censorship or self-censorship. The biggest challenge is how to make a story in such a way that it is understood by everyone and so that the story is not biased. Journalists should*

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<sup>26</sup> Council of Europe, Resolution 2035 (2015), Protection of the safety of journalists and of media freedom in Europe

<sup>27</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, General Assembly resolution 217 A. 1948.  
<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

<sup>28</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*work for all citizens, and not for politicians, business men, and criminals,”* says Milorad Milojević.<sup>29</sup>

Nusret Smajlović agrees with his colleagues stating that the pressures are visible through the ever-increasing influence of political subjects, powerful companies and individuals, which often *“prevent objective reporting and the transmission of information to the citizens.”*<sup>30</sup>

A reporter from Višegrad believes that for the majority of local media, editorial policy is 100% subordinate to local authorities. *“I wish that we had more freedom to create shows that are not political as well as the ability to ask questions without being censored.”*<sup>31</sup>

Another pressure reporters have to endure on a daily basis is financial insecurity. According to some informal comparisons, the average wage for journalists and editors in BiH is generally lower than in other Western Balkans countries. The unofficial data of the Union of Reporters state that the average reporter's wage is around 500-600 Bosnia and Herzegovina convertible marks (BAM) and that only journalists and editors who work for media companies financed by international sources are getting paid more.<sup>32</sup> The 2017 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters without Borders states that conditions for the employment of journalists in BiH are uncertain: journalists are underpaid and most have short-term contracts.<sup>33</sup>

*“I certainly know that journalists cannot make a living by working only one job. They can only do that if they are celebrities or editors of the powerful media companies,”* says Goran Dakić a journalist from Banja Luka, who does various editorial side jobs, because he is a professor of Language and Literature.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>32</sup> IREX Media Sustainability Index <https://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi>

<sup>33</sup> 2017 World Press Freedom Index <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

<sup>34</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

Erduan Katana emphasized that financial instability is the biggest problem for journalists in BiH, as journalism is among the lowest paid professions in the country. *“You have some reporters who have been working for years and are still not employed full time. Some employers take advantage of this and in some media houses, not just private (e.g. ATV), but also the public (RTRS), journalists not only work for low wages, but are also undeclared workers. Consequently, journalists are not motivated enough to do good work and are more susceptible to falling under the influence of politics.”*<sup>35</sup>

*“Survival is an ongoing question. At this very moment, I have given up on research, and I work as a journalist in an environment under the influence of the SDA party. I have large loans to repay and this was my only option to survive. We young people are in a tough financial situation. Larger media outlets are not giving us any support and due to our lack of experience and age, opportunities for individual projects are very slim. So you have to be quiet and do as you’re told in order to afford basic living expenses,”* said a journalist from Tuzla who wanted to remain anonymous.<sup>36</sup>

Dženita Duraković, a journalist from Radio Bihać believes that most reporters who work at the local level are victims of self-censorship due to financial reasons. She also stated that, lately, she is thinking about changing her profession, but is currently in no position to do so. *“If you are not a member of a political party and do not have ‘someone who has your back,’ you don’t have the option to change your job. You are left to battle it out where you are,”* she concluded.<sup>37</sup>

According to Freedom House, politicians and other powerful individuals in BiH consider criticism of their behavior hate speech. Slander was decriminalized in 2003, but journalists are still being sued for it through civic suits. Legally, the one who is suing has to prove the other guilty, but this is not always the case – especially in the local courts, which are often biased and lack the expertise to solve cases involving the media.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Freedom House. *Freedom of the Press 2015*. New York: Freedom House, 2015.

Edin Skokić thinks that cases involving allegations of slander do exist and that powerful individuals are manipulating the law. He mentioned an example from his own experience when Fadil Sarajlić filed a lawsuit against him for an article he had written about Hotel Tuzla. *“I never got the final ruling regarding that case, but Sarajlić called me on my cellphone to tell me that he did not raise the charge for me, but for the sake of the president of the Union. He tried to arrange a meeting with me by contacting some other people, but I had never met him in my life. I do not know what he intended to discuss with me.”*<sup>39</sup>

Harun Bošnjak believes one of the problems with defamation lawsuits is the lack of practice and examples within courts. The inefficiency and slow pace of the judiciary is frustrating to reporters: *“I have sued the mayor of Zenica, Mr. Fuad Kasumović, for defamation because he has accused me of some horrible things on several occasions. I have also asked the Municipal Court in Zenica for protection. A year ago, I filed a lawsuit, however, we still have not reached the main hearing. This speaks to the efficiency of the judiciary and journalists are left with nothing when they see how long one case like this can go on,”* he stated.<sup>40</sup>

Goran Dakić thinks there is another side to this coin and that there are situations in which the media spread unsourced information that opens the door for accusations against them. He believes that the expansion of social networks has led to the reproduction of news without any basis and whose only goal is to draw public attention. *“Nowadays, it seems like all you need to be a reporter is a cellphone and a stable Wi-Fi connection,”* he concluded.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

## 2.2. Threats and physical assaults

In addition to allegations, reporters often encounter threats, intimidation, and even physical assaults as a result of their work. Threats predominantly manifest online, and any response from the authorities is usually non-existent.

A reporter from Tuzla believes that threats made towards journalists are a very serious matter, which the journalists themselves do not take as seriously as they should. *“All of us read threats, get slightly worried, but sadly we are used to it. We have become a target for every psychopath and nobody is held accountable for their actions. I received death threats last year, which were noted in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) of Tuzla Canton (TK) and the individuals who had threatened me were identified, but the case was closed after only issuing a warning to them, they were already known to the police,”* she said.<sup>42</sup>

Admir Muslimović, a journalist from Sarajevo, believes that threats to reporters are becoming more frequent as those making the threats are usually under the protection of politicians. This is particularly the case when journalists critique certain politicians. *“We are talking about a serious problem that the police are not paying much attention to, so basically threats are not being dealt with appropriately,”* Admir concluded.<sup>43</sup>

Edin Skokić has received threats via cellphone and has reported them to MUP, the Association of BH Journalists, and the Tuzla Canton Prosecutor's office. *“MUP told me that I had received a call from Germany but that they couldn't trace it. It ended, but that call caused me serious mental problems, because I did not have ‘bad blood’ with anyone, nor had I written any lies for that matter.”* Edin adds that he is now fearful and those threats have had a long term impact on his health as he decided not to talk about them too much. *“It is difficult to rely on an institution if certain things are not regulated by law*

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<sup>42</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*or if there had not been similar cases that were persecuted. The reporter usually finds themselves with their back against the wall,” Edin concludes.<sup>44</sup>*

Goran Dakić was also threatened on his private Facebook profile for sharing content that wasn't even related to his profession. In addition to the personal threats, the media agency in which he worked at the time also received threats and insults. *“I didn't think that those threats would result in a risk to my safety at the time, but I thought they could trigger future problems and attacks.”* He states that he did not report the threats to the police, but that he would have done so if they had continued.<sup>45</sup>

*“The police have their hands tied when it comes to online threats. They are not capable of finding the perpetrator, because they typically use fake profiles,”* said Harun Bošnjak who not only faced personal threats, but also threats to his family.<sup>46</sup>

Aside from online threats from unknown sources, several of our interviewees have also faced threats at their work places, which were mostly caused by political influences within the media agencies they represented.

*“I work in a profession where critical thinking does not exist. Anything you want to publish is forbidden because of personal interests. You can argue, but that will not change anything,”* said Aid Mršić adding that threats at the work place usually come in the form of written warnings before being fired, removed from your current position, or getting a wage reduction. *“You are being put on a ‘black list’ of reporters who are not suitable to cover ‘edgy’ topics. You end up doing some unimportant things, which management does not care about because you were assigned to a task in which you have nothing to say.”<sup>47</sup>*

Sunčica Šehić is currently in conflict with the media outlet she works for. *“While working for the TV SA web portal, I reported a service information about parts of the city that are deprived of water from 4pm to 9pm. The director told me to delete this news. I, of*

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<sup>44</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*course, did not want to do so, so he shut off my Internet and moved my colleague and me to the informative program. Today, I am operating in an environment where my work has to be approved by two people. I do not agree with censorship and because of my stance, my editors are filing complaints against me. I am very close to being fired.”*

Sunčica emphasizes that she reported this and several similar cases to the Association of Journalists and the Line for Assistance to Reporters. They responded in a timely manner, but her complaints have had no effect on the outlet’s management. *“They are breaking the law and going against basic human and working rights, and they have the support of leading politicians to do so. I do not feel safe and I think that my agony will end in my firing,”* she concluded.<sup>48</sup>

*“I was on the brink of getting fired twice because I wrote two columns about Milorad Dodik. I was working part-time for the newspapers I had written those columns for and I also had a full time job at other papers that were pandering to Mr. Dodik,”* said Goran Dakić. He remembered another situation involving the President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, at a press conference the day after the referendum for the Day of Republic of Srpska. *“I was the only one who had questions after the conference for Mr. Dodik about when the referendums of the Prosecutor’s Office and Court will take place. He insulted me in the presence of other reporters, and he later repeated those insults in the official program of the RTRS.”*<sup>49</sup>

Goran's colleague from the second entity Harun Bošnjak had a similar situation when he received verbal threats from the mayor of Zenica Mr. Fuad Kasumović. *“He came to me when I was standing in a group with ten or more colleagues and verbally threatened me. I went to the police, reported this, and asked my colleagues to testify. Unfortunately, none of them had the courage to support me.”*<sup>50</sup>

Harun also emphasized that he told the BH Journalists Association about this, who reacted immediately and did everything within their power, but Mr. Kasumović

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<sup>48</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

responded by saying that he does not react to allegations from the Association as they are nothing more than a small group of people with personal motivations.<sup>51</sup>

The two areas which are the most difficult to report on in local communities are local politics, corruption and nepotism. Topics which revolve around corruption and nepotism are tough to work on for several reasons such as the lack of time and funds for complex research, lack of sources and relevant people who are ready to talk, and political pressure in cases where corruption is connected with representatives of political parties. Local politics is also a challenging topic especially when it discusses problems that local politicians do not want to be shown in the media.

*“In a small local community, questions around local politics are the toughest. Reporting from the City Council’s meetings and gaining access to local government bodies can be extremely challenging, given the fact that sometimes it is easier to schedule a meeting with the President than with the mayor of some municipality,”* Nusret Smajlović said.<sup>52</sup>

For Goran Dakić, one of his hardest journalistic tasks was researching the property of religious communities and the money, which is given to them from the budgets of Entities and Cantons. *“I’ve been trying for two years to obtain this kind of information. The only thing I got was general information from religious communities which they are obligated to give, the remaining information is impossible to get.”*<sup>53</sup>

### **2.3. The (Un)availability of information: the insufficient implementation of the legal framework**

The right to access information is considered a fundamental human right in every democratic country and it is guaranteed by all international legislature. In BiH, the main warrantor of this right is the Law on Free Access to Information (ZOSPI), which was adopted in 2000. According to this Law, every person has the right to access

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<sup>51</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

information, which is under the control of public authorities, and each public authority has the obligation to publish such information. The public authorities in BiH include an executive body, legislative body, judicial authority, authority that governs a public function, and was given that position according to law, or any other administrative body and legal entity that is owned or controlled by a public authority.<sup>54</sup>

As in many similar cases, effective law enforcement is a major problem in BiH. As it is noted in the World Press Freedom Index, *“BiH has the most liberal laws in terms of freedom of the media in the world, but their implementation is being stopped by the overwhelmed judicial system.”*<sup>55</sup>

Our interviewees mentioned that information from the government is the toughest to access, because government officials often invoke the notion of “official secrets” or sometimes find excuses to not share information that they are legally obliged to provide.

Admir Muslimović states that obtaining information about people who have committed certain criminal offences, and are under investigation or on trial is the hardest. *“Many institutions, mainly governmental – including the governments of canton, entity or the state itself – won’t even answer the reporter’s questions within the legal deadline if they do not like the questions. So, they do not respect the Law on Freedom of Access to Information.”*<sup>56</sup>

Often the problem is not getting the information, but the time it takes for a reporter to receive it. For journalists the speed of reporting is important, and when they have to wait for a long period of time, they often give up on the story because they do not have sufficient evidence or documents to support their claims.

*“Information from government institutions is the hardest to get, because they are pretty much closed to the general public. There are several ways of withholding information, such as telling us the ‘minister is on a trip,’ ‘our spokesman is sick’ or they sometimes*

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<sup>54</sup> Ministarstvo pravde Bosne i Hercegovine. Zakon o slobodi pristupa informacijama. [http://www.mpr.gov.ba/pristup\\_info/default.aspx?id=2574&langTag=bs-BA](http://www.mpr.gov.ba/pristup_info/default.aspx?id=2574&langTag=bs-BA)

<sup>55</sup> 2017 World Press Freedom Index <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

<sup>56</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*deliver the information after the legal deadline or do not give information at all, without any explanation,” Gojko Veselinović said.<sup>57</sup>*

Milan Ilić (Pale) stated that he has encountered many problems with accessing information, both as a citizen and as a reporter. *“Any information is hard to get, if it is ‘edgy.’ For my recent research about plagiarism, I sent a question to an appropriate institution and waited for an answer for a month and then they responded saying that they were not responsible for those issues and not competent enough to answer my questions, although they were. If a reporter is not knowledgeable and patient, stories will fall down very easily because of the insolence of some institutions.”<sup>58</sup>*

Postponing and avoiding access to information, and false interpretations, are daily problems which reporters encounter, and they say that obtaining information that illustrates insolence, poor performance and illegal activity of an individual or organization is more difficult.

The information hardest to get are from courts, different ministries and institutions, but completely ignoring demands for information from local governments, is equally as big of a problem.

Reporters face an array of challenges, and encounter many during just one investigative assignment. If we take into account their everyday pressures in work, censorship and self-censorship, threats and physical assaults, performing the job of a journalist at a local level is increasingly becoming a fight for survival. Continuous threats of getting fired, the lowering of wages and general financial insecurity make the reporter's profession an extremely underappreciated job in a local community, which can have major consequences. Even though the law itself is very good, as stated above, reporters feel insecure, dissatisfied and lack opportunities to progress. One of the biggest problems is the poor implementation of existing legislation in BiH.

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<sup>57</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>58</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

## 2.4. The fear of defamation lawsuits

***When someone gossips, disparages, insults honor or gives statements which are untrue, even though he knows that they are false, to create a negative image of a certain individual, business, product, group, country or people, it is defamation.<sup>59</sup>***

Recent reports on the state of media often emphasize the problem of lawsuits on defamation towards journalists. These lawsuits are filed by the individuals or institutions that the journalists are reporting on. As noted by the association “BH Journalists,” in 2018 most lawsuits against reporters were filed by politicians, presidents of political parties, directors, and public servants. These actors should be receiving a greater critique by the media. According to the info of the Line of Support for Reporters, 100 lawsuits on defamation are being filed on a yearly basis. There were 173 cases in 2017.

The majority of journalists that we interviewed have not encountered lawsuits for defamation so far, but they say that this is a common issue. They view it as pressure on the work of the media. On the other hand, they agree that truthful reporting, objectivity, and following the rules of reporting are the best way of fighting against any kind of lawsuit, including the one for defamation. However, the fact remains that local powerful people often use defamation as means of scaring the reporters.

*“Lawsuits for defamation are a means by which individuals inside the institutions want to destroy any kind of critical reporting. Although I have not found myself in court for this matter, I have had some indications for it. I believe such processes must have consequences for the reporters’ careers. Such affects are especially true in a country where we listen to the critiques on the judicial system’s work and objectivity daily. We also do not see the efficiency in some segments of its activities, such as the domains of processing corruption and organized crime, where it is most expected,”* states Alen Bajramović.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> InMedia, 2013. Zna li šta je kleveta? <https://www.inmedia.ba/zna-li-sta-je-kleveta> (10.3.2018.)

<sup>60</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

Reporters believe these situations call for the law to be regulated. Concrete evidence or even medical examinations should be presented for allegations of “inflicting mental pain” or similar “consequences” as a result of journalist’s reports. Also, the responsibility for published content should be limited to media editorship. *“Individuals would be less susceptible to that kind of pressure. Also, this would entrust greater responsibility upon the editors, to guarantee their reporters are publishing truthful information,”* Alen Bajramović believes.<sup>61</sup>

Another reporter that was a part of this research was accused of defamation. Nusret Smajović says that he has dealt with this and other kinds of accusations for the past 10 years. *“Accusations have become frequent and they have a big impact on my work. I think that in this case, many things are dependent on the state, namely the laws which are tightly connected with defamation. If the laws were more about reporter’s job, authorship of work and the reporting itself, then we would not be in a situation where we face a lawsuit for defamation for every text we write.”*<sup>62</sup>

There are examples that, when the journalist’s job is done in a proper way, there are no fears from lawsuits for defamation. One of these examples is stated by Erduan Katana, who thinks that although there are problems regarding lawsuits for defamation, it is not a pronounced problem. *“I think that several cases showed that if you do your job in a professional manner, even the courts in BiH will rule in the reporter’s favor. I would like to mention the case of Ljiljanja Kovačević who was sued by the president of RS, Milorad Dodik, for defamation and he lost the case.”*<sup>63</sup>

According to research answers, the biggest problem concerning defamation is that you can get sued by simply broadcasting someone’s statement or text.

*“This of course has a great influence on the work of reporters and they are much more cautious. On the other hand, as far as I know, the largest number of cases regarding the lawsuits on defamation in Republic of Srpska was against the public media (RTRS). Many*

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<sup>61</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*cases for unprofessional reporters work were filed by the opposition, and some of them were won in court,” states Erduan Katana.<sup>64</sup>*

The possibility of a defamation lawsuit affects the reporters. After the lawsuits, they do not dare to engage in investigative stories out of fear. These lawsuits are often one of the mechanisms used by politicians who abuse their position, or who do not work according to the law, in order to fight against reported facts. *“This of course makes the reporter’s job more difficult, but their responsibility is to point out negative societal phenomena, despite the pressures,”* Gojko Veselinović believes.<sup>65</sup>

There are three laws about defamation in BiH: The Law on Defamation Protection in the Federation of BiH, The Law on Protection from defamation in the Republic of Srpska, and The Law on Protection from defamation in Brčko District. These three laws are similar. There are four criteria of defamation. Firstly, the existence of false information. Secondly, the identification of a person that is being damaged by the defamation. Thirdly, telling other people and finally, damage which affects reputation.

When it comes to the lawsuits for defamation, the reporters also carry a large responsibility. According to our speakers, if the story is broadcasted with facts, there is a minimal possibility of facing a lawsuit for defamation.

*“We have the example of the Center for Investigative Reporting, which has received several lawsuits for defamation. All of these lawsuits were rejected, because they have the evidence that everything that they are writing about is the truth. I agree that there are increasingly lawsuits that are being used to pressure the reporters to give up, or to make them confess that they have committed defamation in order to avoid paying for the fine. Such scenarios eventually lead to the worst kind of censorship,”* Milan Ilić states.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

Unfortunately, there is no reliable statistic for the number of cases in which people are sued for defamation. This is because the courts do not keep separate records on defamation procedures. Instead, they are registered under compensation of damages.

## **2.5 Modern challenges at work**

The reporters named several challenges to their work. These challenges include being objective, reporting truthfully and resisting media pressure. The modern age brought new challenges, such as digitalization and the availability of information, which has never been bigger or faster. This is yet another challenge that traditional media outlets face. Nowadays, information is mainly free. All one needs to access it is a computer and an Internet connection. This leads to an even bigger economic pressure on the media, and therefore on the reporters. All of this made the reporter's jobs easier, but it also brought a new challenge of verifying the validity of information, copy/paste journalism and a constant battle with click bait, which they have to do if they plan to survive in the modern media world. One of the journalism functions achieved is opening a space for debate and confrontation of different opinions. However, this has brought journalism into an unenviable position, as they almost lost the right to publish news first.

If we look from the local level perspective, and journalism in smaller areas, it is clear that local news businesses are lost in the process of the globalization of information. Because of this, the sole purpose of local media to inform about local themes and problems is often lost in the abundance of information that arrives from all corners of the planet at incredible speed. This is probably one of the biggest challenges of the so-called local journalism.

*"I think that social media is very useful nowadays, if used correctly. The problem is that the reporters publish information without checking its validity, which therefore discredits them from any further work,"* says Milan Ilić.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

The reporters that took part in the research say that the challenge in the age of Internet is to be both fast but also correct. *“Thus, shattering the widely perceived perception of journalism as just information forwarding. To stay a reporter, even though you know that you have done a similar report countless times by following daily events,”* Alen Bajramović explains.<sup>68</sup>

Political turmoil, social apathy and distrust of the media with the notion “they are all the same” are challenges that the media in BiH are facing. *“All of this has an effect on the work of media workers. It also contributes to the fact that the relationship between the public and media are constantly shaken,”* Tahir Žušta from Tuzla states.<sup>69</sup>

### **2.5.1 How to fight increasing online threats to journalists?**

An increase in online threats to journalists is one of the problems detected in this research. Online spaces, which are not legally regulated in Bosnia and Herzegovina, open up the possibility of everyday insults – and even death threats – under a hidden identity. This problem is extremely apparent on social media, as well as open comment sections on Internet domains. There are no precise statistics of death threats to journalists via the Internet, as the majority of such threats go unreported. Threats, pressures, defamation, hate speech, encouragement of hate speech and discrimination all fall under online violence. According to statistics of the association “BH Journalists,” there were 16 online attacks in 2017 alone.

Our interviewees think that online threats are a serious thing. Although journalists often take them for granted and do not report them, they often have a huge impact on their work.

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<sup>68</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

A journalist from the Tuzla canton received a death threat, which was reported to the police. The perpetrators were identified. However, this journalist does not think that the police protection is adequate, because even after the whole ordeal, she did not feel any safer. *“Unfortunately it all ended with just a warning to the offenders, which were known to police from previous violations. The police reacted as if it was just a normal occurrence. I spent two days in police questioning, as if I were the one who broke the law.”*<sup>70</sup>

This is a serious problem that the police don’t want to pay much attention to. According to Admir Muslimović, they do not treat such threats in an appropriate way. *“I’ve had disagreements from people from other political parties that don’t think the same, but I’ve never had any death threats.”*<sup>71</sup>

The approval of such threats, their justification and their repetition are much more dangerous than the threats themselves, some surveyed people think. Therefore, journalists must have more adequate protection.

Surveyed journalists also think that Internet threats are serious because they are working in an unregulated system, in which different opinions on forums and comment sections are completely discredited.

*“We all have a Facebook or Twitter account, and we can be easily found and threatened. As harmless as it may seem at that time, threats for writing can often turn into assault, and assault can turn into something much more serious. That is why I think that journalists must get a special status, which will potentially influence those who want to threaten them. Such offenders will think twice about threatening an official,”* Dalibor Tanić reckons.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

Advancements in technology has allowed for hate and anger to reshape and take a new form, and they start to be absorbed from the physical world into the virtual public realm. Such things should not be ignored, even though they are often left to chance or to be forgotten. *“Obstructing journalists with death threats, physical or any other form of violence is a sign that this society cannot accept someone’s way of work, or converse about it personably or politely, so they resort to violence. BiH needs a louder and stronger devotion of journalist associations, which, evidence shows, only react on certain occasions, and any kind of prevention is nowhere to be seen,”* says Tahir Žustra.<sup>73</sup>

Some journalists say that they have not had a problem with Internet comments lately, but only because they've decided not to read them – especially comments written under pseudonyms. Some of the surveyed people received online threats, but they didn't report them. There are also those that think such comments should not be taken seriously, because social media in BiH is a place for different opinions to clash and argue about a range of topics, such as divided societies, national questions, languages and war crimes. These are the topics that cause the most hate speech and hate encouragement in the online world.

*“As a journalist, I was physically assaulted and also threatened by phone and notes. I did not receive threats in the comment section below my texts, but I did receive insults. Threats to journalists in any shape or form must be treated seriously and institutions have to react in a timely manner. This must be enabled so that the affected journalist can be protected, and the offender must be found and sanctioned. Threats must become sanctioned by law in order to prevent them from becoming actions,”* Milorad Milojević concludes.<sup>74</sup>

Online violence towards journalists affects reporting, which is the goal of anonymous commentators, but also organized Internet assaults on certain media outlets in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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<sup>73</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

In this research, we bring you an example of a journalist from Visoko whose local authority tried to discredit him through the Internet. *“A photo of my colleague and I was edited so it appeared that we were holding three fingers up while wearing hoodies with emblems of Serbia. In such a small community, such a photo became widely available very soon and it had a lot of comments, and even calls for lynching and death threats,”* says Nusret Smajović. The case was reported, but the investigation and reactions from the relevant authorities was very slow, so the journalists were left to fight for themselves.<sup>75</sup>

## **2.6 When the editor or director says NO: facing censorship**

The study “Media and shrinking space in Bosnia and Herzegovina: silenced alternative voices” is based on empirical research of media actors in BiH. This study highlights some of the main problems between journalists. These problems include the fact that journalists produce numerous stories every day, that they are bribed and that they don't have the time to make a quality story. Further problems include the media owners having commercial interests, that a large proportion of journalists are separated by different ideologies, and finally, that due to political and economic influences a lot of journalists submit themselves to censorship and auto-censorship because they are afraid to lose their jobs or suffer financial sanctions.<sup>76</sup>

Censorship means limiting and overseeing the freedom of speech. According to the definition, it can be conducted in a wide range of means and actions, from destroying unwanted means of expression and erasing unwanted parts, to changing and twisting the parts that do not align with the opinions of the current authorities or editor.

Numerous journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina are faced with restrictions, bans, inabilities to choose topics on their own, and editorial and political pressures every day.

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<sup>75</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Lejla Turčilo. Mediji i shrinking space u BiH: utišani alternativni glasovi. Sarajevo, 2017.

Out of the restrictive measures they face, they name censorship first, then the influence of political parties on media and then the unqualified editors whose orders they have to carry out.

Mirsad Behram states that he was met with different situations and editorial politics during his work in local media. He says that some of them were even comedic. *“When I was a young journalist, there was a situation where the editors literally glorified one local official in the morning, and then their “boss” would order them to “turn the page on him” and to criticize him in the afternoon programs. As I was against such conduct, I was one of the first to get fired. On top of that, I did not get any benefits such as registered length of service and other things”.*<sup>77</sup>

Journalists want to have a choice of topics and interviewees, without any interference or adaption to the political persuasion of the editor. They want to work without the fear of getting fired because of an undesirable guest in the studio, or a topic that the editor or a local official do not like.

*“I encountered a situation where an unqualified editor shortened my story without any real explanation. The explanation given is that explanation: this is superfluous, while in reality someone just won't like what I wrote. Other colleagues were also targeted because they didn't include someone's statement in their stories. Lately, there is less and less room for critical reporting on accountability, reluctance or failure of government officials. In most cases, journalists work on assignments that have been already planned by the local authorities”,* a journalist from Zenica explains.<sup>78</sup>

Journalists are often faced with imposed interviewees or topics that are, for the most part, politically motivated. There are times when objections sometimes beat the editorial will, but sometimes it is impossible to fight for a different stance. *“They will often tell you to not call this or that interviewee because he is in this or that political party. Not him, because he bad-mouths someone else. These are all every day*

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<sup>77</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*restrictions. I'd love to be able to choose content we follow without political interference,"* Aid Mršić says.<sup>79</sup>

Pressures on journalists can be both political and economic, and they can also be direct or indirect. Direct pressures, censorship aside, include media threats or threats to journalists, as well as economic pressures (for example, the recall of ads from a media source that critically reports about the advertiser). Some of the surveyed journalists also claim this is true.

*"When you work on commercial media, the restrictive factors are your clients and advertisers mostly, more than political subjects. In different media houses that I worked in so far, I was met with restrictions so that the news report wouldn't negatively affect the quality of advertiser's promotion. I was also met with influences on creating content and passing down the information and messages from the representatives of local authorities while I was working in the local media,"* Tahir Žustra says.<sup>80</sup>

Journalists that are hired in some of the local media say that censorship is a major part of the daily work routine. *"The inability to choose my own interviewee because they oppose the current authority is my biggest disapproval. That is truly humiliating for a journalist,"* a journalist from Višegrad reckons.<sup>81</sup>

Stories that don't appear like a nuisance on first glance are also targets of censorship. However, if journalists dig deeper and find out that all is not well with the project financing which initially appears to have a humanitarian character, censorship follows. *"I faced censorship for reporting on a story about children with cancer. The story talked about problems in funding a home for parents, in which they are staying with their children whilst they were undergoing therapy. Everything I wrote about the possibilities*

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<sup>79</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>80</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>81</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

*of financing was censored. I'd love to have the freedom to help sick kids,"* Sunčica Šehić states.<sup>82</sup>

Some of the interviewed journalists were censored many times, in very direct ways, whilst some never had these experiences. Analysis shows that censorship doesn't hit journalists that are correspondents of non-Bosnian media i.e. that are funded from abroad. Censorship is much more expressed in local media that are funded from public budgets.

Aid Mršić explains what is actually behind this. *"The main editor simply comes and tells you what you should do. It is written as they told you, as the director ordered! Of course, it is up to you whether you comply or not. If you do not respect it, sanctions follow, and it is up to you to endure. Young journalists tend to endure it because they are just starting their careers, and they can't decline the task for various reasons."*<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>83</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

### 3. The profitability of profession: characteristics and advantages of reporting on a local level

*Democracy demands an environment in which not only different versions of facts can be opposed and tested by citizens, but also an environment in which a different accent and coverage of those facts and events can be found.*<sup>84</sup>

The work of journalists has its advantages even though it's often made harder. In most modern countries and communities around the world, media are the main source of information and the creators of public opinions. Journalists have the power and responsibility to inform and educate citizens about the most important events in the world. The role of media on a local scale is even more important in those regards, because they present the first source of information when we want to know more about every day occurrences in our community, city or county.

The role of public influence is one of the more prominent among journalists that we interviewed for this research. *"The main advantage is the possibility to start a debate about a certain topic, to have influence on the general public, to point out mistakes and to influence on the betterment of institutions' transparency,"* Milorad Milojević reckons.<sup>85</sup>

The advantage of journalists is that they are always at the source of information, they have the knowledge and skills to search for information and to constantly meet new people and acquire new experiences along the way.

*"Personally, I love field work and life stories from them. Communication and meeting a large number of profiles is one of the advantages of this work. The second advantage is the opportunity to correct some of the mistakes and point out some of the problems in*

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<sup>84</sup> The Report of the High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism. A free and pluralistic media to sustain European democracy. 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

*society through our work. You have a chance to point out different anomalies in society, to help young people in promoting their work, and to have humanitarian gestures very often,”* Dženita Duraković reckons.<sup>86</sup>

*“There is no better feeling than when you have enough proof, style and opportunity to expose a criminal and not be afraid of doing so,”* Goran Dakić explains the advantages of journalism which, for him, include research, meeting new people and communication in addition to creating public opinions and providing the general public with information they can't reach on their own.<sup>87</sup>

### **3.1 When being a journalist is an advantage**

Interviewees stated the possibility of research, being well informed, asking questions, a flexible work schedule, meeting new people, the possibility to be creative and to learn constantly as some of advantages in their profession.

*“There is one advantage which should be enough on its own: we are journalists and we create public opinion,”* Dalibor Tanić states clearly.<sup>88</sup>

Contacts with people from different areas of living, the right to demand information and to pass it down to the public, an attempt to correct the mistakes and point out to social anomalies and to point to problems are just some of the other advantages that journalists point out when talking about their job.

It is interesting that one of the advantages is also the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina has an inexhaustible source of topics and information for every interested journalist.

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<sup>86</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>87</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*“The advantage of being a journalist in BiH, before all else, is the fact that they don't have to look too hard for interesting topics because they are all around in Bosnian society. Any field of work has enough problems to write a whole book about it, not a mere article. There aren't any other advantages, besides that, when you look at some other developed countries of the European Union,”* Erduan Katana says.<sup>89</sup>

This attitude clearly points to the fact that Bosnian journalists work in a very unregulated system and society. This is especially apparent on a local level, because, as previously said, even though that topic is plentiful in smaller areas, it is hard to get to the real interviewees and make the best complete story in the best way possible.

Selma Tahirović shares a similar opinion. She thinks that BiH is an inexhaustible inspiration for the political program and its size regarding unity and organization of the country, but also for social topics, which are a consequence of such organizations but also aggression.<sup>90</sup>

When we talk about journalists in a local community, some of them don't see the advantages of journalism because of the fact that they work in small local areas with limited resources for research and are the constant stress under the local authority, owner or funder of that private media.

Edin Skokić from Tuzla says how there are almost no advantages in journalism *“unless someone thinks that being a journalist means that you can skip the queue to talk with a prime minister is an advantage. The advantages in journalism outside of Sarajevo are scarce, because it's rare that journalists from the inside report from relevant world events or even football games where the BiH football team is a host.”*<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>90</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

### 3.2 Why are some stories difficult for reporting?

Corruption and nepotism, local politics, affairs, money laundering, post-conflict topics and social divisions are the most difficult topics for reporting. All of these are especially difficult in local areas where there is a lack of resources in every way, especially economical and where it's often impossible to get information due to non-compliance with the Law on the Right to Information.

Journalists surveyed for this report explained that corruption and nepotism are on the top of “difficult to cover” topics just because of the fact that, as they believe, those who are connected with corrupted acts are actually protected by authorities. As a “difficult to talk about” topic they also point out the stories about post-conflict Bosnian society, because some of them state that in BiH there are still “three truths” on this topic.

Journalists say that it's easier to report about economy, sports, culture themes, but also topics regarding volunteer work, nongovernmental organizations and “ordinary people” stories.

Asmir Muslimović explains that stories about crime and corruption are hard to report on because you need a lot of time to gather evidence and proof, documents and all the information that support that story.<sup>92</sup> Arnes Grbešić also shares a similar opinion. He thinks that such stories take up a lot of time and that it's difficult to make a good story on this topic without any additional funding.<sup>93</sup>

“Politics, corruption, nepotism, big fatalities, war topics and post-conflict relations are the hardest topics to report on,” says a journalist from Sarajevo who wanted to remain anonymous.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

Many journalists state topics about post-conflict society, war aftermath and division that occurred after the war as the hardest topics to work on. Reasons are different, from the fact that these topics require sensitivity and the fact that Bosnian society is still deeply divided.

Milan Ilić says every story is both difficult and easy in its own way. He finds the post-conflict topics the hardest ones to work on in a way that *“you never know what reaction you're going to get, and it's very difficult to work on stories with people that actually lived through all of that.”*<sup>95</sup>

*“Because of everything that was happening in Srebrenica, the most difficult thing to report on are questions related to war and post-conflict relations. But I tried my best to be objective when I was reporting on commemorations in Memorial Centre Potočari, as well as commemorations of Serb victims. I think there were certain comments, but I didn't have any problems, until now at least,”* Sadik Salimović says.<sup>96</sup>

Some of the interviewed journalists say that every story is difficult to do if done in a professional way. Mirsad Behram gives a vivid description of field work: *“About local politics – the so called opposition has “ammo” to fire at the authority every day, there are so many problems but they are still silent. And how are journalists supposed to do something when those that should have the biggest interest in it don't? War? I had an experience when a father of a disabled son refused to give a statement about the event where Serb forces burned his kid alive in a village near Nevesinje because he sells honey at Nevesinje now. Economy? The workers of a company gone bankrupt want the FBiH authority to solve the issue of combining the registered length of service, they ‘divert’ everything to questions of nationality, but they refuse to say that their company started*

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<sup>95</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>96</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*its business illegally, through unlawful privatization, for which the local official who fled to Croatia was accused of more than 10 years ago.”<sup>97</sup>*

Topics that deal in local politics are also singled out as difficult topics because of the fact that access to local authorities can be a big journalist feat and the often lack of adequate or available interviewees.

*“Local politics, the politicians' unavailability to give statements, corruption and nepotism, a big problem to reach concrete examples”,* says Nebojša Kolak, a journalist from Trebinje.<sup>98</sup>

As opposed to the so called “difficult” topics, the interviewed journalists point out stories that talk about the economy, citizens' activities and educational stories as stories that are easier to report on. As an easier topic they also pointed out to election reports.

*“The easiest reporting is about the destinies of normal and creative people and successful projects, two-faced people are a problem on the other hand, people that have financial and political power. Topics about corruption and nepotism are hard to report on because they are hidden. But everything can be researched thoroughly, but in the Western countries, this is specially paid for because bigger risk carries more serious consequences. It's not the same thing to report from a press conference and to report on a topic a few days and then receive the same pay,”* says a journalist from Zenica who wanted to remain anonymous.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>98</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>99</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

### 3.3 Can and should media and human rights activists be partners?

The work of journalists and human rights activists correlate with one another in more ways than one. They are fighting for freedom of speech, transparency of public institutions' work, and the suppression of nepotism and corruption. The common goal of both groups is the fight for truth and equality. Both of them suffer pressures – political ones before all. Even though there are clear differences between these two groups, it's a given that they should be partners in promoting true universal values. These are some of the conclusions our interviewed journalists came to.

The biggest pressures for both groups come from the politicians and police. They often classify some journalists' work or nongovernmental organization's work as attempts to bring down the system.

*“With the appearance of social media, the border between activists and journalists was brought to a minimum. When you have a Twitter or Facebook account and you post something that calls for action, you are an activist. And if you write an article about it tomorrow then you are a journalist. So the border between the two is almost transparent,”* Dalibor Tanić says.<sup>100</sup>

The interviewees reckon that the goal is to cause changes, and they can easily be caused by just posting a tweet or a text, while abiding to the rules of profession. Both of these groups are faced with challenges.

The work of journalists and human rights activists often coincide with one another in many areas. *“They are both here to help citizens or to help them ease a way towards*

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<sup>100</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*solving a particular problem. Their common goal is the public and its problems. Whether they do that in the correct way is another question though,”* Aid Mršić reckons.<sup>101</sup>

To have a good source of information is of outmost importance for every journalist, and human rights activist but also other civilian and nongovernmental organizations can be an inexhaustible source of topics and information for journalists.

Some of the interviewed journalists believe that the goal for both groups should be the same – the rule of law and equal possibilities for everyone, but they say that it’s not often the case in reality. Partly because of the political pressures on both sides, which interviewees identify as a work problem.

*“I think journalists’ and human rights activists’ work align with one another. Those two things must not be separated if you truly want to make some positive advancements in society. The problem in BiH is that there is no real public and judiciary support for journalists and activists. Then on the other hand, there is a big number of nongovernmental organizations that are tackling these issues which actually suits those that deal in politics,”* Erduan Katana explains.<sup>102</sup>

It is hard to unite for a common action in a divided society. *“The simplest example for it is the fact that in BiH nowadays, not even two syndicates from different entities can work together even though worker’s rights are severely endangered,”* Erduan Katana says.<sup>103</sup>

Media have to work closely with the nongovernmental sector because they have the same social goals, which is to be a corrective factor and to point out to things that are bad and need replacing. Both journalists and activists search for truth in their research.

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<sup>101</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>103</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

Both of them can face threats at work, and the biggest challenge is to acquire adequate information.

*“I think that pressures on journalists and activists are very similar and they have similar features of suppression and censorship of that voice. I really hope that their goals are for a much better society in which we live i.e. for them to act as some form of social correctional facility,”* Nusret Smajović says.<sup>104</sup>

We have recorded different attitudes on whether journalists and human rights activists should work together and on what types of cooperation they should have. One of these agree that their work coincides in a way that one can be a journalist and a human rights activist at the same time, especially if working on topics that deal with the most vulnerable groups. *“You are fighting for their rights as a journalist because you are reporting on that story, but you are also trying to better their position from a human standpoint. As far as I’m concerned, I’m a peaceful activist and I’ve received various name callings and pressures such as people marking me as a member of an NGO sect, or a Soros supporter,”* Dalibor Tanić says.<sup>105</sup>

Journalists and citizen activists are in the same position. They should be fighting for citizens’ rights, but at the same time, they are a barrier to them. Journalists note that the work of these two groups coincides, but they also note that both of them are under the influence of politics and that both groups are not financially independent, which is the main catalyst for their survival.

*“A human rights activist chose to honestly fight for a goal, which a journalist should also do, but there are certain journalists that are trying to avoid the truth and report on what*

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<sup>104</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*the political sector or other institutions want them to report. That's not good,"* Sadik Salimović reckons.<sup>106</sup>

There are also different views on these two groups, such as the one that journalists are true fighters for human rights and that they actually do it through meaningful actions and that activists merely declare themselves as such for some certain projects. *"They declare themselves as activists for the financial profit of said projects,"* Maja Nikolić says.<sup>107</sup>

Even though most of them think that these two groups, which are exposed to equal pressures, should be on "the same side," our interviewees mention that in BiH *"nongovernmental sectors only exists in times of big project grants."*<sup>108</sup>

*"Not a single nongovernmental organization issued a statement regarding my case. I think our goals are not aligned. Their goal is profit while my goal is an honorable and fair fight for causes already lost,"* Sunčica Šehić reckons.<sup>109</sup>

Interviewed journalists also note that both groups have this country, its complex system and many levels of authority as work obstacles, which leave enough room for discrimination, various malversations and work irresponsibility with which journalists and activists have to deal with every day.

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<sup>106</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>109</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

## 5. The future of journalism

*In a time when the coin “post-truth” was chosen for the word of 2016 and in a time when the term “alternative facts” is used for interpreting politician’s claims, media and journalists face a unique ethnic and professional challenge.<sup>110</sup>*

The role of journalists will always be the same: to provide professional, clear and timely information. Regardless of modern technology and speed, social media and a bigger and faster stream of information, this role of journalism has to remain the most important. However, the surveyed journalists think that new technologies will be the downfall and extinction of classic media – primarily the press.

To increase printing rates, media turn towards “yellow press” and circulation is the only reference when advertisers are concerned. Because of this, the means of fighting for a larger circulation are diverse. Circulation of printed media depends on the purchasing power of the population. For example, pensioners are avid newspapers readers, but they can’t afford them every day. There are some suggestions to hand out press media for free in order to increase printing and attract advertisers in that way, but it’s a suggestion that requires deeper analysis.<sup>111</sup>

Our interviewees believe they will be working in a more ordered system in the future. They also hope to be freed from political influence and to be lawfully protected. They think that the challenges they face nowadays won’t change for the better.

They see the technical-technology aspect as one of the biggest challenges in the future. *“The media in BiH are slow and old fashioned, and changes in that segment could be challenging. Journalism used to be highly appreciated not so long ago, but it’s not the case today. Journalists themselves are to blame in most part for that because they are*

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<sup>110</sup> Ethical Journalism Network. Ethics in the News. London, 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Konferencija: Mediji u regionu između senzacionalizma i opstanka. Banjaluka, 12.5.2017.  
<http://bhnovinari.ba/fes/dokumenti/Konferencija-Mediji-region-izme%C4%91u-senzacionalizma-opstanka-Izvjestaj.pdf>

*the ones that create social-political streams. There was a time when prime ministers and directors were removed from their positions due to journalists' stories, but today that situation is reversed. Journalists are being removed by them. It's highly unlikely that the situation will change anytime soon,"* Aid Mršić says.<sup>112</sup>

Others expect the public word to have much more impact in the future, and that one of the biggest challenges will be maintaining order in the media market, especially on web media segments. Journalists point to the obligation of returning to main postulates of journalism as of outmost importance, as well as erasing yellow journalism, sensationalism and everyday biased reporting.

*"In essence, I don't think that the role of journalism will change. It's a question of how that job will be done. It will depend heavily on the development of modern technologies. Journalists will have to be ready to also do the technical part of journalism. And that's something that journalism faculties should also pay more attention to,"* Arnes Grbešić explains.<sup>113</sup>

Interviewees also fear that journalists might, in the case current trends continue, become mere transmitters of political thoughts and opinions and that without any serious EU investments in creating an independent journalistic environment, not much progress will be made in BiH.

*"I've been a journalist for fifteen years and looking back at those years it appears that there's never been less objectivity and more media illiteracy than now. Online media is taking over a big role in transferring information so it'll be very difficult to be a journalist in 10 or 15 years because everyone is considered as a 'reporter' in this era of social media,"* a journalist from Višegrad adds.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>113</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

Some other answers suggest that journalists believe their role will be much more meaningful in the future, much more so than today. They also believe that journalism will be more appreciated in the future.

*“I hope that the system will fall in place in the foreseeable future because that would mean that journalists will have their place in this society again, which would mean normal objective work without threats and pressures. Those are the challenges we face now, and unless there are some social changes, those problems will continue to persist in the future,”* Nusret Smajović says.<sup>115</sup>

The journalists surveyed think the basic postulates of journalism can’t be changed that easily, even though time brings new work conditions, technologies and challenges, and that there’s always going to be a need for reporting. *“More attention should be paid to journalism faculties, because gymnasium students and others shouldn’t dabble in journalism,”* Sadik Salimović adds.<sup>116</sup>

The possibility of professional development and perfecting better curriculums at journalism faculties and practical work during studies are some of the things that journalists consider important for better working conditions in the future.

Journalists participating in the survey say that journalism will slowly take a shape of propaganda in the Balkans unless there are some radical changes. The international community is the best hope to change this situation because the Balkans will become a front for hybrid warfare between big powers, they say.

*“New media and easily accessible, low-cost information technology showed the world, not only Bosnians, that everyone can meddle in media, to create, plan and publish content – to call themselves journalists. That’s why I think that salvation lies in better order of the media associations themselves, whose numbers have dwindled, but the*

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<sup>115</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project “Real Voice of Journalism”. January – April 2018.

*work quality would be elevated to a higher level by implementing journalists' licenses which would be used by 'professional journalists' to separate themselves from 'hobby journalists.' This could work to make a difference between information passed down by a journalist and information passed down by interest groups whose only goal is to manipulate the public and disturb journalists' work. Unless such an act is done, ten years from now, there will be insufficient interest in journalism, and we will still have an illiterate media population who will be ready to believe anyone," Zoran Cvjetinović from Bjeljina concludes.<sup>117</sup>*

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<sup>117</sup> Post-Conflict Research Center. Interview during the implementation of the project "Real Voice of Journalism". January – April 2018.

## 6. Recommendations

*In this chapter, we bring you recommendations and ideas that interviewed journalists pointed out as most important for journalists in local communities.*

- Stricter laws protecting journalists, regulating defamation laws, and introduction of the law about ownership transparency, and a more ordered system of online media;
- Stricter fines for violation of ethics;
- More efficient regulating bodies such as Press Council or Regulatory Agency for communication in BiH;
- Transparency of institutions on all levels in BiH;
- Protection of journalists from mobbing at work, censorship or poor working conditions and low salaries;
- Proper implementation of information access laws;
- Legal ban of censorship and political involvement in journalism;
- Respecting of ethical and professional standards;
- Legal regulation of the work of online web portals;
- Better legal solutions to protect journalists during their work, and to sanction attacks on them more severely;
- Improvements of journalists' material position;
- Black market suppression, dealing with black market journalists who have been working for years without paid contributions, healthcare rights;
- Increased inspections due to unregulated length of service commissions and unregulated salaries;
- Freedom of work and reporting and a sense of protection as the bare necessities to ease journalists' work
- Change of public relations towards journalists, politicians especially;
- Change of journalists' status, a possibility to be treated as "officials"
- Choice of editors based on skill, not politics or other similarities;
- Stricter criteria for media control, public media with no political influence, stricter fining of politicians for "misuse of position," a more quality journalism sector;

- Understanding of editorial staff – they must understand that some topics need more time and nurturing;
- Media content analysis and higher quality media regulation would definitely elevate this profession on a higher level and make the job easier;
- Implementing a clause that journalists can decline a task, without any consequences, if it doesn't comply with professional standards;
- Education of political authorities and better work of journalist associations;
- Better networking between journalists;
- Better technical-technology capacities;
- A better quality of Internet signal, 3G or 4G network that is more widely available.

## **7. What do journalists have to say to decision makers and the media community?**

- To stop using media as their own voice. Reporters are not their PR service. Politics and journalism have never been in friendly relations throughout history. And to our dear colleagues: Please decide – politics or journalism. Otherwise, stop ruining our reputation.
- Decision makers: Stop pressuring media freedom. Media community: stick to truth and professional standards.
- Let us do our jobs and implement adequate laws to protect us
- No matter the differences and fact that they are rivals, media should stick and fight together for a better status for their employees and take this joint stance in front of decision makers. Decision makers should look at journalistic work as a suitable correction factor in society, accept and correct mistakes in the system that journalists are pointing to and thus change their own image in society.
- Reforms on all segments of society are necessary. Before anything, one burning issue that should be addressed is corruption and nepotism. In addition to this, media should be financially strengthened so that journalists could report in an unbiased and professional manner, without fear for their own existence.
- Improve legal framework for the protection of journalists. Such initiatives already exist from journalists associations. Criminal code should treat attacks against journalists as attacks on officials. Attacks against journalists should be prosecuted and punished adequately. Stop hate speech, especially online.
- Respect journalists, their time, work and role in society. Institutions have to be transparent, politicians have to be more well-mannered when dealing with journalists, and they should not use media for personal bickering.
- Allow journalists to practice their profession freely, truthfully, rightfully and allow them access to information needed for their research. Answer their questions, don't interfere with their work and don't pressure them.
- Decision makers need to use their positions in order to ease journalistic work through protection of journalists, better access to information and less pressures. With this type

of relations between politicians and decision makers, both low and high-ranked, journalists will be able to perform better, because they will not depend on “outside” influences. When this happens, the media landscape will be improved.

- I would ask each and every decision maker in a live TV program: “Are you uncomfortable for everything that you were in charge of and you ignored? For everything you should have done, but did not? For everything you should have done for citizens, but have not?”
- Decision makers: Stop spreading nationalism! Media community: Report in an unbiased way or stop being journalists.

## Instead of a conclusion

*Only journalists can fight for serious and free journalism.*

All reports done in the last years that talk about the media situation and freedom of media, pointed that the situation of media in BiH only worsened in the last 10 years. That is especially reflected in local media, which face financial problems, political, and other pressures since the beginning of the war up until today.

This research clearly shows that pressures on journalists, as well as challenges they face in times of modern technologies in a poor, war-torn country, are getting worse. Local journalists usually face problems in everyday work, including constant political and societal pressures. The financial position they are in has never been worse, and threats they face have never been more serious, especially online.

Funding of media from public budgets contributes to media sustainability on the small and poor BiH market, in circumstances where most media don't have enough potential incomes. The lack of transparency of issuing these funds as well as unclear and imprecise criteria opens space for possible misuses and they ruin the public perception about the legitimacy of these findings and the independence of media who receive them.

Material status of local journalists and censorship they encounter every day are detected as the most serious problems. Social-economic status of journalists opens up a lot of questions on its own. Journalists are susceptible to bribes, mobbing and threats of dismissal. Due to inability to find new work, they remain trapped in certain media houses that suffocate basic postulates of the journalism profession.

Discrete or open censorship is something that most local journalists have faced. The biggest number of them did not react out of fear of retaliation. Those that did react were left to fend for themselves without the help of authorities or institutions, because laws are either not implemented at all or not implemented properly.

Another problem is the lack of solidarity between colleagues when it comes to threats and pressures. A big number of interviewees recommend joining in some sort of syndicates or groups as means to improve working conditions.

One thing is for sure, journalists need help to fight for more decent work on the local level, but before anything else, they need unity and to insist that journalism has to be freed from every influence and be held responsible for every word written.

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This research presents a summary of different literature, reports and articles, and also data we received by interviewing 30 journalists which work in 17 local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Interviewed journalists come from: Banjaluka, Bihać, Bijeljina, Cazin, Dobož, Goražde, Gradačac, Mostar, Pale, Sapna, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Trebinje, Tuzla, Višegrad, Visoko and Zenica.



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Western Balkan's  
Regional Platform for  
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