

RECOMMENDATIONS

Various collaborators of the Peace Institute, and in particular the participants in the Media Watch project ongoing since 1998, carried out a number of research studies and published many findings and reports. All were part of our efforts to achieve greater diversity of media content, greater dispersion of media ownership, more credible and accountable media operation, better access to media for minorities and increased responsiveness of the media to citizens' proposals and complaints. During public debate on the new law on rtv Slovenia in 2005, and on the amendments to the Mass Media Act in 2006, we submitted remarks to the solutions proposed by the Ministry of Culture and compiled and argued for concrete changes to a number of legislative proposals that were inadequate in our opinion. We invariably explained in writing our alternative proposals and attempted to argue for them during their public presentation in Parliament. Practically none of our proposals that offered integral and conceptually alternative solutions to the controversial points in the two laws was accepted, apart from some minor ones that concerned corrections to other proposals. The bills that were eventually passed into laws implemented in practice the model of media policy tailored to the goals of the ruling coalition.

Based on the conclusions of the monitoring of the three segments described above, we give several key recommendations that reflect and reinforce our past efforts.

1. Media ownership and its influence on media independence

The provisions in media legislation stipulating restrictions on media concentration should be accompanied by effective mechanisms for supervision and penalizing of failures to comply with these provisions. Participation of governmental bodies responsible for this area should be ensured.

In addition to stipulating restrictions on media concentration, the government should adopt a pro-

active approach by stipulating and developing clear, independent and effective mechanisms for encouraging media plurality through state subsidies. State subsidies should be allocated by an independent body on the basis of clearly defined and transparent criteria and granted to those contents that cannot 'survive' autonomously on the media market. It is especially important to prevent the abuse of subsidies to exert pressure on media that are critical of the government, or to reward media that report favorably on the government.

In granting special status and benefits to non-profit, community, minority and other media for the production and dissemination of content in the public interest (in Slovenia such status is enjoyed by radio and television programs of special significance), the government should ensure regular supervision of whether the media meet the requirements regarding the implementation of agreed responsibilities and content and whether they observe professional and social standards.

When debating and amending media legislation, the government should ensure the participation of representatives of the interested public during the preparation stage, promote public debate and the confrontation of various viewpoints and solutions, and allow sufficient time for reaching a consensus on key issues of media policy. The law makers should take a clear stance on the proposals and remarks submitted by the representatives of economic entities, professional unions, experts and ngos, and explain their reasons if they decide to reject these proposals.

The state should withdraw from media companies because it has been proved that stakes owned by state funds and state-owned companies are exploited in order to exert political influence on the media, business and editorial decisions and the appointment of executives.

Journalists and their associations should make an effort to remedy the mistake they made in the past when they sold out their interests in media companies obtained in the privatization process. The situation could be improved by strategic pooling of re-

sources to purchase ownership stakes in media companies or to establish their own media outlets.

Information on media owners, and on the owners of media owners, enables citizens to establish whether there exists conflict of interest. Therefore, this information must be accessible to the public, while the government should stipulate and take care that the data in publicly accessible databases are truthful and regularly updated. The transparency of data prevents the holders of political and economic power from abusing the media for the promotion of their own interests.

In the majority of countries, public service radio and television are in crisis as a result of scarce funding, continual interference from government in the media operation or the lack of serious political will to transform state-owned media into public service media. The situation in Slovenia is much the same. The legislation and the development of public radio and television should be steered towards greater participation of the public in the management and supervision of public radio and television, while ensuring their institutional and editorial autonomy in terms of funding and management. It is especially important to enhance the functions of public service broadcasters and strengthen their role in providing social cohesion and inclusion of all groups and communities, especially minorities.

Legislation, internal documents and professional codes should include principles and mechanisms for the prevention and penalizing of publishers' or owners' attempts to exploit the media as an instrument for achieving particular political aims. The present codes of journalists' associations do not meet these requirements fully, and furthermore, publishers/broadcasters and owners should also be obliged by such documents to respect the codes. The complaints and adjudication mechanisms should be expanded to include journalists, publishers and the public.

Social circumstances of employees in the media industry affect the quality of work and responsibility demonstrated by journalists and other media workers. Media professions are vulnerable. However, the

importance of their social role and their indispensability in exercising the right to freedom of expression, acquisition and dissemination of opinion and information mean that it is in the interest of society as a whole to secure favorable social circumstances for media people to perform their work. The transparency and stability of social circumstances should be established through collective agreements between the employers and employees.

ngos concerned with the media field, expert associations, interested and professional groups should be strengthened in terms of organization, material conditions and staffing. They should cooperate among themselves, reach agreements, debate and negotiate on how to ensure the realization of interests they represent. Their common goal should be a developed, clear, and successful media operation in the public interest.

In order to achieve greater inclusion of citizens in media activities, civil interest groups and ngos should aim for more active and creative use of new technologies and develop new, autonomous forms of media production and dissemination of content. In so doing they should establish links with similar civil initiatives abroad.

2. Television news

Television broadcasters, and the public broadcaster in particular, take into serious consideration the finding of our research that politicians dominate the group of interlocutors in the main news programs, and make an effort to include more topics and interlocutors from outside the political arena, especially the representatives of civil society and minority groups.

They should also make an effort to move away from Ljubljana-centric coverage and include more topics relating to regions and localities outside the capital. In addition, television companies, and the public broadcaster in particular, should make a deliberate and systematic effort to increase the representation of women in the news. When covering international topics, more attention should be de-

voted to events and circumstances outside Europe, and topics from all continents should be included. Such measures towards elimination of the negative trends in the structure and content of television news should be developed systematically by introducing regular internal monitoring, editorial analysis and meetings, internal guidelines, mechanisms and decisions.

3. Reporting on minorities

When reporting on minorities the media should take utmost care to comply with the legal provisions and professional standards outlined in journalistic codes of ethics. On the other hand, individual media could develop their own internal ethical and programming guidelines for this delicate area. Media professionals, and editors in particular, should take heed of repeated alerts by media researchers pointing to the mistakes made in presenting various minorities.

With the help of internal rules of conduct, supervision mechanisms, careful editorial policies and continual analysis of editorial decisions, media companies should ensure that the members of ethnic, social and other minorities are not stereotyped or treated in a discriminatory manner.

The coverage of minorities should necessarily include the viewpoints of the representatives of these communities. In order to achieve this, journalists and media companies should cultivate contacts with minority groups. This could be realized by engaging a journalist who specializes in that specific area, is well informed about it and maintains contacts with the group.

Reported events should always be placed in a context, because conflicts between the minority and the majority group, or within a minority group, are not isolated incidents but usually have a long history.

There is no reason why the main actors appearing in media reports on minorities should be politicians. The media should seek topics and interlocutors out in the world and provide regular coverage

of the life of minorities, instead of the current practice of covering excesses. This would enable the readers, listeners and viewers to obtain better knowledge and to better understand the situation of minorities.

The media could develop mechanisms for verifying the quality and suitability of the coverage of minorities in cooperation with representatives of these groups. The members of minority groups should regularly inform the media about their activities and efforts. They could provide feedback on media coverage through letters to the editor. All editorial offices should have available clear complaint mechanisms that make possible prompt and immediate publication of corrections.

Both the national and the local media should pursue a systematic employment policy that would ensure the inclusion of minority group members working as journalists and other media employees. This could be achieved by adopting one of the exemplary models involving scholarships, training and practical work that would increase the number of qualified journalists and media employees coming from minority groups.

By recruiting staff members from among the minority groups, media companies would increase employees' sensitivity to minority related topics and ensure that they are better informed about these issues.