



Contribution to the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism 9th session of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

A Joint UPR Submission on Croatia by International PEN, the Croatian PEN Centre and the International Publishers Association

April 2010

International PEN, the Croatian PEN Centre and the International Publisher's Association welcome the opportunity provided by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to comment on the deterioration of free expression and independent reporting in Croatia as a result of increasing monopolisation of the the media.

There has been a marked improvement in recent decades, yet there remain a number of issues arising from the armed conflicts in the nineties: the return of refugees, the restoration of their rights, the implementation of minority rights, and, generally, an unwavering commitment to the rule of law. Regarding freedom of expression, specifically, the concerns are:

In the Croatian public sphere, ensuring involvement of citizens and enabling them to make informed decisions in the democratic process is seriously endangered. After decades of authoritarian intervention, there is now monopolistic control exercised by commercial interests with clear links to the political decision-makers. Although there are laws against monopolies, these are frequently disregarded. Journalists in all types of media are increasingly dependent on a very few connected media owners and there are no alternative employers. The result of this concentration of media ownership is a steep decline in the quality and quantity of investigative journalism. There are also direct threats against journalists, physical violence and a couple of deaths possibly related to reporting, but these extremes are connected with clearly criminal activities, not mainstream democratic deficiency.

The commercial need for high sales and quick turnovers have destroyed quality journals in the field of culture and encourages disregard for the rights of privacy.

Some of these trends are of course quite widespread globally, but the specific problem in Croatia is that the same nexus of commercial and political interest controls the public television, financed by compulsory subscription of all persons owning a TV set and by additional state subsidies.

The prevailing commercial interests are now endangering the positive developments of the past decades that had led to greater protections against hate speech, the achievement of the reconciliation process and a decade of non-governmental activism.

This submission recommends:

- A halt to the monopolisation of the media with its resulting erosive effect on independent journalism
- The protection and promotion of an independent press
- That measures be implemented to end attacks on journalists by criminal elements, by full and proper investigation into these instances and the bringing to justice those who use violence to intimidate independent commentators into silence