

THE EDITORS' ROLE IN MEDIA INTEGRITY  
PROTECTION IN THE COUNTRIES OF  
SOUTH EAST EUROPE

# THE NECESSITY FOR REINVENTING THE EDITORS' ROLE AS GUARDIANS OF MEDIA INTEGRITY

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, as in the past, we can observe on a daily basis in international, national and local media how editorial decisions and leadership can influence whether citizens will be served with the best or the worst of journalism, and how this affects democracy. It does matter who the editor is.

The findings of our first regional study on media integrity in the countries of South East Europe, conducted in 2013/2014, were alarming: *“Editors are mainly not the first or the best among equals (journalists), but the proxies of media owners who qualified for editorial jobs through their servility and lack of ethical reservations.”* Such role of the editors is *“a factor in the degradation and instrumentalisation of journalists and journalism for satisfaction of private interests”* (Hrvatín and Petković 2014, 36).

We have concluded that one cause of the media in our region having been captured to serve corrupt relations in politics and the economy is connected with media ownership and financing patterns, but also, importantly, to the worsening situation of journalists and particularly to the lost integrity of editors.

After having explored the harmful financial patterns, particularly state-media financial relations in our research reports in 2015, we decided to study in more detail the editors' role in media integrity protection, examining their legal status, educational background, professional conditions (appointment and dismissal procedures, safety and professional self-organisation), economic and social status, as well as participation in and exposure to political affairs in the country.

Between February and April 2016, the SEE Media Observatory researchers in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia conducted dozens of interviews, a survey and a review of relevant

written sources to obtain a better picture. Studying examples of events or situations that illustrate the editors' role in the protection of media integrity was also part of the research. We focused on editors-in-chief, with some exceptions in several countries where other senior editors were also consulted.

## 1 GENERAL OVERVIEW: WHY IT MATTERS

Throughout our media integrity research conducted within the SEE Media Observatory since 2013, we have regarded any journalism not serving the public interest as corrupt. Therefore, it is essential to analyse not only the conditions faced by journalists and editors in media companies but the professional culture, or lack thereof, within which their work takes place. To quote Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, "a newspaper can flout an advertiser, it can attack a powerful banking or traction interest, but if it alienates the buying public, it loses the one indispensable asset of its existence" (Lippmann 1999, 207). Journalism without the public, or alienated from the public, not only loses its ground for existence, it also acts in ways harmful to democracy and devastating to public and political debate. The crisis of the media industry that we have been observing over the last two decades, and which exacted a particularly heavy toll on the countries of South East Europe, is first and foremost a crisis of journalism. Our media integrity research has revealed the extent to which journalism has transformed into an appendage (or a servant) of private interests, to what degree it has allowed itself to be used as a political instrument, and the ways in which journalism has become an obstacle to media integrity rather than its guarantor. If we are even to begin rethinking the mission of journalism and public interest media, we must first tackle the inability of journalists and editors to reflect on their own role in how private interests alienate debate from the public.

It has now been decades since Michael Schudson claimed that critics look at the press and see Superman when it's really just Clark Kent (Schudson 1996, 17). While critics may indeed see power where there is none, or overestimate how much power there is, the fact remains that the media themselves think they have power and that they are free to trade in it. We can agree that in a democratic society the media cannot (and should not) replace state institutions or assume their roles. Moreover, we can concede that the public is not merely a wellspring of democratic potential, but can follow populist and discriminatory ideas, with extremely undemocratic effects. However, we should firmly reject the idea that the media participate in the process simply as transmitters or "innocent" observers.

It is the media where the private interest is misrepresented as public interest, where the concept of politics and the political is transmitted in such a way as to discourage people from actively participating in public life. We need to consider

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this problem in a certain historical context. It is essential to understand why the media have been entrapped by private interests. *“The rise of commercial mass media, (...) has paradoxical political consequences. It democratized the market for newspapers; at the same time it centralized the production of political information and ruptured the connection between the press and an active public. It led to the decline of politically-committed journalism and its replacement by a professional journalism that claimed to stand above politics. (...) It also changes the performative content of journalism: it transforms the newspaper from a political message addressed from citizen to citizen, inviting the reader to participate in political debate or action, into an authoritative account of the state of the world, addressed to an audience whose own role in that world normally is not an issue. For these reasons, the modern news media do not produce the kind of active, critical public debate that the newspaper seemed to promise when it first emerged as an institution of the public sphere”* (Hallin 1994, 34–35).

Thus, the work of a journalist is no longer addressed to an interested citizen but to a consumer whose needs are ascertained through opinion polls, persuasive communication, or through direct sales. Furthermore, if the immediate connection of journalism to public interest is severed, this results in what our research has shown. Journalists and editors become tools and weapons at the disposal of their owners, fighting their battles, serving their political and/or economic interests, and misusing media space either to promote certain personalities or to smear their opponents. What we are describing here is not journalism. It is an abuse of public communication in the service of private interests. Therefore, one of the key steps in ensuring media integrity is to think clearly about what journalism is and what it isn't. As a whole, the media may well be beyond redemption, but we should certainly look for models that will help us save public interest journalism.

In this study, we focused on the role and significance of editors and editorial work in media outlets. Most legislation contains provisions on the autonomy of journalistic and editorial work. But what does this autonomy imply? Journalists and editors are supposed to carry out their work independently of any individual interest and exclusively in the interest of the public. Historically, as the role of the owner was separated from the roles of the publisher and the journalist, the editor was put in charge of safeguarding the basic principle of journalism: to act in the public interest. As David Remnick, the editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, unambiguously quipped, *“I feel it's all my responsibility. Even the cartoons.”*

Our research examined the editorial position on several levels: legal, educational, professional, economic and political. The interviews conducted by our researchers have revealed that, in ensuring professionalism and autonomy, the “weakest link” seems to be the editors' lack of understanding of their intended role. Most editors do not see themselves as protecting the professionalism of journalists, but as carrying out the will of the owners. The wall that once separated the

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work of journalists from that of the marketing department has long since been demolished, and from its ruins has sprung an unacceptable culture of subservience to the interests of the owners and advertisers. The demand for media integrity is necessarily a demand for upholding editorial autonomy, and for a commitment on the part of the editors to exclusively serve the interests of the public.

## 2 THE LEGAL STATUS OF EDITORS

Media legislation in the countries of South East Europe seems to generally guarantee freedom of expression and media freedom, thanks also to efforts made in these countries to align national legislation to requirements in their application for EU membership. There is satisfactory regulation in place on freedom of expression, access to information, prohibition of censorship etc. However, the legislation does not specifically address the role of editors in any of the countries. The closest it comes in this regard is when setting standards of content or general professional norms, especially in the area of audiovisual media regulation. In addition, editorial independence is generally protected in all countries by law, but in a general way, without detailing any particular mechanisms to protect editorial freedom and independence. Research conducted in all countries concludes that, in spite of all the lip service paid to editorial independence and freedom in legislation, the failure to develop further tools for or ways of protecting this freedom has contributed to a situation on the ground where nothing is being done to genuinely ensure that editors and their staff are free and independent.

In none of the countries covered by our research the media legislation divide the figure of the editor-in-chief from that of the journalist. It means they enjoy the same rights and face the same obligations. Even when it comes to content regulation, the main concern in legislation of all countries is to protect the citizens first, rather than the professional freedom of journalists. There is also a concern in most countries that, while general editorial independence is upheld in the law, freedom and independence of the editors or their staff from the owners of their own media outlets is never addressed, not even formally, even though this is one of the most persistent and worrying trends in all countries. If we add to this the poor self-regulation bodies and mechanisms in each country, the need to guarantee better protection for editors becomes even more urgent. For example, in Serbia a model offered for editors proposed to shield them from any influence of media owners, trying to fill the gap in the existing laws in this regard, but there is no evidence that such a model was adopted in any media outlet.

Regulation on editors and especially content is slightly more detailed when it comes to public service broadcasters (PSB), where all the countries have

WHILE GENERAL EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IS UPHELD IN THE LAW, FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE EDITORS OR THEIR STAFF FROM THE OWNERS OF THEIR OWN MEDIA OUTLETS IS NEVER ADDRESSED, NOT EVEN FORMALLY, EVEN THOUGH THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST PERSISTENT AND WORRYING TRENDS IN ALL COUNTRIES.

specific content requirements that need to be respected regarding editorial content. In addition, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the law specifically lays out rules of incompatibility for editors-in-chief, related mainly to independence from political parties. Furthermore, PSB bodies in the region tend to be more active in establishing internal rules, statutes, or codes of conduct, mainly because the law requires them to. Referring again to Bosnia and Herzegovina, all three public service systems there have adopted internal editorial principles; however, no specific role for the editors has been envisaged even in these cases.

The lack of detailed regulation or self-regulation on the role of editors, as well as the absence of detailed internal procedures, leads to a weakened role for the editor in practice vis-à-vis the public. This is also aided by legislation that fails to appoint a specific person, such as an editor, to deal with the media's relation to its public, be it in lawsuits or demands for retraction, correction, or other related matters. Even in the Serbian case, where the law is more detailed on the responsibility of editors regarding the right of reply and the right to a correction, in practice the editors fail to respect such criteria, and implementation of legal stipulations is ineffective. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Press Council has been active for years, editors have been shown to have a key role in the mediation process involving complaints from the public.

The work of editors is also affected by the failure of the environment to facilitate their role. For example, reports from both Serbia and Kosovo point to the failure of the police to address threats or violence against editors. In addition, in Serbia the prolonged lawsuits and the insignificant damages awarded in public complaints against media sometimes fail to hold the editors sufficiently responsible for upholding ethical norms. Finally, the poor implementation of labour laws also leaves editors vulnerable in all countries in this study and does not encourage them to prioritize their profession.

### 3

## THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF EDITORS

Journalism education is available in all countries in the region, both at the university and as continuing education for mid-career journalists, even though the quality of the programmes is sometimes debatable, according to the research. Furthermore, in some countries the number of journalism students is dropping, or journalism degrees have been transformed to communication and public relations degrees, indicating that journalism is no longer a highly desirable profession.

Apart from formal university education, in all countries there have been continuous short- or sometimes long-term training programmes for mid-career journalists, offered mainly by other organisations and institutions. Although such training opportunities have been numerous, there are doubts about their

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consistent quality. In addition, some respondents questioned the effectiveness of the training of journalists and editors, given the overall corrupt state of the media system, which prevents journalists from working in accordance with the principles and methods taught in independent training courses.

In general, the background of editors in all countries in this study did not come predominantly from journalism degrees. Most of them came from the social sciences, literature, philosophy, law, etc. In addition, even though most of them generally held at least a bachelor's degree, research in several countries indicated that it was not unusual for editors to have only a high school diploma.

The general pattern that emerged from all countries was that education did not constitute at all a key criterion in hiring editors; neither was professional excellence the main requirement that the media outlets were trying to promote in their hiring procedures for editors. Instead, political affiliation, conformism to media owners, and ability to put forward their own interests and those of their owners came up as the most frequent motives for hiring editors, rather than education or experience.

In fact, several research reports emphasized a change of trends in the practice of hiring editors and in the profile of current editors, compared to those of a decade or more ago. While previously the path to becoming editor was schematic and lengthy, and one had to go through various stages, it is not unusual now for editors to rise rapidly to occupy the top position in the newsroom. The research indicates that this trend coincides with the rise in importance of media owners against the background of media privatization or establishment of private media, and the decreasing influence of the figure of the editor. These trends have led to a situation where respect for the editor has diminished, along with his or her ability to influence newsroom policies. What became clear through all research reports was that editorial careers are no longer being determined by education or a specific career path to be followed, but rather by affiliations and other factors not necessarily related to professional achievements.

#### 4

### THE PROFESSIONAL CONDITIONS FOR EDITORS

The professional situation of editors hardly differs in the countries surveyed in this research. The appointment and dismissal processes for editors were in most cases closed and internal procedures, rather than public, open, and merit-based competitions. Even when there were attempts to have public competitions, as required by law, such as in Serbia for the public service broadcaster and minority media, the appointments were made after a public competition, but the rationale behind the appointment process was far from transparent, and the decision was made by politically elected bodies.

THE BACKGROUND OF EDITORS IN ALL COUNTRIES IN THIS STUDY DID NOT COME PREDOMINANTLY FROM JOURNALISM DEGREES. MOST OF THEM CAME FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY, LAW, ETC. WHILE PREVIOUSLY THE PATH TO BECOMING EDITOR WAS SCHEMATIC AND LENGTHY, AND ONE HAD TO GO THROUGH VARIOUS STAGES, IT IS NOT UNUSUAL NOW FOR EDITORS TO RISE RAPIDLY TO OCCUPY THE TOP POSITION IN THE NEWSROOM.

Along the same lines, there are no public calls for job positions and consequently no specific and clear requirement on the appropriate criteria to earn a job as an editor. While for public service media there might be more elaborate requirements defined in the law, such requirements for private media are unheard of across the region. As a result, what reigns in the appointment of editors for private media is the arbitrary will of media owners, who often have no previous links to journalism and lack the necessary knowledge. Even in countries where editors of public service media have to be appointed based on some key requirement, the process itself is determined by the general director or governing bodies, which tinges the process politically.

The arbitrary nature of appointment procedures for editors is generally agreed on across all countries in the region. Unfortunately, this arbitrariness is even more pronounced when it comes to firing or dismissal of editors. The situation of job safety among editors is not markedly different from that of journalists, meaning that they usually work either without contracts or with formal contracts that rarely go into the professional part of their job and tend to focus more on administrative issues. Even in the rare cases when prior agreements have been drawn up, these have proved to be worthless when the first problems have arisen, as has been the case in Macedonia. It has not been unusual to link dismissals of editors by owners to political reasons. This has been more pronounced in Macedonia, where the lengthy and aggravated political crisis has led not just to dismissals of editors, but also to frequent transfers of editors from one media outlet to the next, leading to a highly volatile climate and lack of job security.

Newsroom staff, especially journalists, are not known to participate either in the appointment, or in the dismissal process of editors in their own media, which contributes to a less cohesive environment within the newsroom. Some editors indicated that, if journalists participated in the process, this would further increase editorial independence, while also contributing to an improved work climate in the newsroom.

Editors are not different from journalists even when it comes to self-organisation. There were no specific associations of editors in any of the countries in the region, and neither were there awards or professional achievements designed for editors. Initiatives for the professional advancement of editors are totally lacking. In fact, respondents in the study indicated that most of the time communities of editors are divided, for political, ethnic, or even professional reasons. These deep divisions prevent them from both self-organising and self-regulating, and often they fail to join in solidarity when a colleague is threatened, assaulted or professionally affected.

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Editors hesitate to talk openly about their economic situation, particularly salaries and contracts. Several of our researchers underline that editors' salaries seem to be one of the biggest secrets in the media community in their countries. In Serbia, it was only the decision of the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance that forced the public broadcaster *RTS* to disclose, in January 2016, average salaries for all job positions in 2015, including those of editors.

Based on the interviews and a survey with editors in each country conducted within our study, and on secondary data from other studies, we can conclude that in economic terms, considering their job contracts and salaries, editors in the region are doing better than journalists, in some cases significantly better. Exceptions are editors in local media and online media. There is, for instance, the case of an editor in Kosovo who had worked as editor-in-chief for a news portal for six years without a contract and for a salary of only 250 euro per month.

In Albania, it is estimated that salaries of editors in national media range from 100 thousand ALL to 300 thousand ALL (approx. 714 to 2,140 euro) per month, while in local media it is much lower, between 15 thousand and 50 thousand ALL (approx. 107 and 357 euro) per month. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is estimated that salaries of the majority of editors fall between 500 and 1,000 euro per month, but they can be less than 500 euro in smaller and private media. In Kosovo, based on our survey with editors, we can conclude that in most cases their monthly wages range between 500 and 1,000 euro, rarely between 1,000 and 1,500 euro, while there are cases of editors with monthly salaries of less than 500 euro. The average net salary of editors in Macedonia ranges from 400 to 500 euro per month. That marks a significant decline, according to our research, since 5-6 years ago editors' salaries in Macedonia were between 1,000 and 1,500 euro per month. Still, editors remain the best paid media workers in the country. In Montenegro, according to our survey among 15 editors of the most relevant media, ten have a salary above 1,000 euro per month, and five below 1,000 euro.

Editors in large media owned by foreign corporations are the best paid, 2,500 euro or more per month. Editors in public broadcasters seem relatively well paid in most of the countries. This is said taking into account average salaries, particularly salaries of journalists, and general economic poverty. For instance, the disclosed information about the average salaries at the public broadcaster in Serbia *RTS* indicates that the average net salary of chief editors is approximately 1,500 euro per month for TV media, and considerably lower, 850 euro, for radio. At the same time, the average salary of journalists at the public broadcaster in Serbia is about 400 euro per month. In Montenegro, our survey revealed that, among 15 editors answering our questions about the range of

IN ECONOMIC TERMS, CONSIDERING THEIR JOB CONTRACTS AND SALARIES, EDITORS IN THE REGION ARE DOING BETTER THAN JOURNALISTS, IN SOME CASES SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER. EXCEPTIONS ARE EDITORS IN LOCAL MEDIA AND ONLINE MEDIA.

their salaries, those coming from the public broadcaster reported salaries below 1,000 euro.

In some interviews, editors from various types of media clearly complained about their salaries, claiming to be inadequately paid considering the amount of work and responsibility. However, cases of publicly expressed dissatisfaction of editors with their conditions of work or pressures they are experiencing are rare. Job security can contribute to that: our report from Kosovo emphasizes the importance of permanent employment contracts for editors at the public broadcaster *RTK* in the context of their decision to organise protests against political influence in their media (and survive the protest!).

According to our research in six countries of the region, editors' salaries are paid quite regularly in comparison with journalists, whose salaries can be delayed for several months. Still, there are cases, such as the case of the daily newspaper *Bota Sot* in Kosovo, where journalists and editors did not receive their salaries for more than a year and are now trying to reclaim their money through the court. In Bosnia and Herzegovina one editor said that in 15 years of his career as a journalist and editor, his monthly salary had gone unpaid at least 15 times.

As our report from Albania emphasizes, despite being better paid and having certain financial advantages, the editors are in principle equally insecure in terms of job security as journalists are. Similarly, in Macedonia, editors have no job security and *"can be replaced after a single phone call"*. In Montenegro, on the other hand, most editors taking part in our research said they have regular employment and a permanent contract.

It is not a rare situation, particularly in local media, for the same person to hold both positions – of editor and director. This is not considered conflict of interest in the legislation. For example, in one-fifth of local television stations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the director is simultaneously the editor. This is also the case at some national media in Montenegro. According to one of our respondents, that solution *"provides that public interest does not prevail over the business interests"* in the media. One of the key recommendations from our country researchers emphasized in their reports is to legally require these two positions to be separated and occupied by different professionals.

## 6

### THE EDITORS' EXPOSURE TO POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Positioned closer to media owners than to journalists, editors nowadays commonly conform to the interests and agenda of the politicians and political parties favoured by their media owner. Such conformism has contributed to a decline in the importance of editors and, as is emphasized in our report from Albania, media owners now communicate with politicians directly.

CASES OF PUBLICLY EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION OF EDITORS WITH THEIR CONDITIONS OF WORK OR PRESSURES THEY ARE EXPERIENCING ARE RARE. DESPITE BEING BETTER PAID AND HAVING CERTAIN FINANCIAL ADVANTAGES, THE EDITORS ARE IN PRINCIPLE EQUALLY INSECURE IN TERMS OF JOB SECURITY AS JOURNALISTS ARE.

Political influence on the status of editors is most evident in cases involving their replacement. Editors, even in private media, are typically replaced for political reasons. Particularly editors in public broadcasters, state-owned news agencies or other media which are, as in Serbia, still partly owned by the state or local authorities, are clearly appointed and dismissed based on political criteria. Such politically motivated replacements of editors rarely provoke public debate or solidarity actions. However, a recent case involving replaced editors at *RTV*, a public broadcaster in Vojvodina province in Serbia, after the 2016 elections, led to public protests. The power of organised resistance of editors to political pressure was demonstrated in Kosovo, where editors at a public broadcaster self-organised at the beginning of 2015 to jointly oppose political influence and instrumentalisation at *RTK*. The protest was started by 12 editors, who were subsequently joined by 50 other *RTK* editors and journalists. In fact, the immediate targets of the protests were their superiors – the editor-in-chief and his deputy – who had submitted the public broadcaster to political pressure, censoring the programme in order to provide politically biased reporting in favour of the ruling party. In Albania, editors of various media united in their refusal to broadcast the video material produced by political parties during the election campaign, a rule imposed by the Electoral Committee.

In Macedonia, editors are under enormous and unscrupulous pressure, says Marina Tuneva from the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia.<sup>1</sup> Political pressure is backed by the media owners and executed through the editors. There is total control of news production in pro-government media by the ruling party, while the small number of remaining critical media outlets, their editors and journalists are subject to disqualifications and threats. Some of the most shameful cases of political bias and unprofessional editorial decisions in the history of the Macedonian media have occurred in recent years.

The cases of violence and physical attacks on editors of the media in Montenegro have not been adequately investigated and solved, owing to political obstruction. In this deeply politically divided media community, some editors even forced their media to report these physical attacks in favour of the assailants. One editor from Montenegro claims that there is no journalism in these polarised media, no media content based on facts, but only interpretations and hard-core political agendas.

Editors rarely take part in politics directly and openly. Still, there have been cases of editors and journalists becoming political party candidates for parliament or the state presidency. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former editor of the political magazine at the public broadcaster *RTV FBiH*, suspected of favouritism towards the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in that capacity, was later, in 2014, nominated for a member of the BH Presidency as an SDP candidate.

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1 Marina Tuneva, executive director, Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia, interview for the report on editors' role in media integrity protection in Macedonia, Skopje, 9 March 2016.

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POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON THE STATUS OF EDITORS IS MOST EVIDENT IN CASES INVOLVING THEIR REPLACEMENT. POLITICALLY MOTIVATED REPLACEMENTS OF EDITORS RARELY PROVOKE PUBLIC DEBATE OR SOLIDARITY ACTIONS. HOWEVER, A RECENT CASE INVOLVING REPLACED EDITORS AT *RTV*, A PUBLIC BROADCASTER IN VOJVODINA PROVINCE IN SERBIA, AFTER THE 2016 ELECTIONS, LED TO PUBLIC PROTESTS.

Nothing in the profile and position of today's editors-in-chief empowers them for the protection of media integrity, says our researcher in the report from Serbia. This can be said for the whole region. The capacity of editors to reinvent themselves as guardians of independent journalism seems hollow. Still, when editors raise their voices in the protection of professional integrity, when they unite and resist, they do manage to obstruct further degradation of journalism, at least for a certain period, and gain public support. Or, they are beaten by their media owners, as was the case of an editor in Kosovo, or attacked and threatened by organised crime with political backing, a widespread pattern of attempted silencing of journalists and editors in the region.

There are arguments saying that the only way to improve the status and role of editors in the region in terms of their ability to provide journalism that serves the public interest is to improve the conditions under which media in the region operate.<sup>2</sup> But, who will request and fight for improved conditions if not the very journalists and editors who are exposed to these dreadful conditions? Who will take responsibility if the conditions don't improve and journalism continues to lose its role of serving the public interest? *"People act responsibly when they exhibit a sense of obligation to themselves, to others, and to a particular situation. Responsibility is an expression of self-restraint guided by these obligations"* (Ansell 2011, 135). Being responsible means that journalists and editors are capable of reflecting on what they do, on the significance of their profession, and on their relationship to the public. And this process can only be based on knowledge, openness, an idea of what constitutes journalism, and on a firm commitment to the future of the profession.

The independence of media, editors and journalists corresponds to their dependence on the public. This is the paradox of journalistic work with which we must come to grips. Paying attention to individual corrupt media outlets, editors, journalists and journalistic practices will never get us closer to the very gist of the problem: that the system within which the media operate continually imposes on them a dependence on private interests. The further removed media become from the public, the closer they get to the centres of power they are supposed to be overseeing. The unenviable position of journalists and editors, by no means uncharacteristic in this day and age, should not serve as an excuse for journalists forsaking the standards they have set for their own profession. If they are unable to do so, the least they can do is to inform their readers, listeners and viewers of their inability. At the same time, citizens should be aware that saving journalism is their right as well as their duty.

<sup>2</sup> Goran Đurović, *RTCG* Council member, written interview for the report on editors' role in media integrity protection in Montenegro, 18 March 2016.

THE ONLY WAY TO IMPROVE THE STATUS AND ROLE OF EDITORS IN THE REGION IN TERMS OF THEIR ABILITY TO PROVIDE JOURNALISM THAT SERVES THE PUBLIC INTEREST IS TO IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH MEDIA IN THE REGION OPERATE. BUT, WHO WILL REQUEST AND FIGHT FOR IMPROVED CONDITIONS IF NOT THE VERY JOURNALISTS AND EDITORS WHO ARE EXPOSED TO THESE DREADFUL CONDITIONS?

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**THE NECESSITY FOR REINVENTING THE EDITORS' ROLE AS GUARDIANS OF MEDIA INTEGRITY**