



first publication

in cooperation with the Institute for Strengthening Democracy in BiH / Presentation at the Eighth International Seminar *Democracy and Human Rights in Multiethnic Societies*

Introduction

Respect for human rights in a country counts as a measure for democracy. Respecting the declarations and covenants of human rights is a basic condition, which every country with the aim of integrating itself into civil society should fulfill. The acceptance of these declarations and covenants means the implementation of the human rights they guarantee. Nevertheless, if we scratch beyond the surface of these declarations, we will see that most of these human rights are deprived to every one as an individual and to the society to which one belongs on the whole. This is why it is important to address the question of the respect paid to the cultural rights of ethnic minorities and how those rights are presented in the media, in the own language of such minorities.

This essay aims to address the role of the media in presenting the cultural rights of ethnic minorities, based on the first generation of human rights – political and civil rights –, as well as the second generation – economic, social and cultural rights. In the first case, the media should act in order to preserve individuals from interference by the state in their civil and political rights, and in the second case, the media should act in order to improve the interference by the state in preserving the cultural rights of ethnic minorities.

This study will largely be based on a comparative approach, relying on literature by local and international authors, their books and articles, as well as internet sources.

General Insights into Cultural Rights

In Article 2 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities*,¹ which entered into force on December 18, 1992, persons who belong to any kind of minority have the right to enjoy their own culture, to practice their religion, to use their language, in private and in public, freely and without any kind of discrimination. The first article of this declaration² obliges the state to protect the existence of a national, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of ethnic minorities. By the *Declaration of the Principles of International Co-operation*³, each culture has a dignity and value that must be respected and preserved, and in that aim, every person has the right and duty to develop its culture.⁴ The role of the media in preserving the culture of one group in a certain society cannot be denied.

According to Maggie Wykes,⁵ media are central tools for knowledge and disseminators of knowledge. Today, as we witness the increasing difficulty in finding common and original cultural elements in the modern world, we must recognise the media's important role as crucial factors in preserving and presenting cultural values and the specificity of certain groups.

It is characteristic of democratic society that it respects the rights of individual human beings, and, in this sense, respects the identities of different cultures within society. Ernest Gellner⁶ stresses that it is possible, even very common, in a relatively stable society to establish legally, ritually or otherwise enforced status distinctions, which turn people into basically different kinds of man. However, even those stable societies, as Gellner stressed,⁷ are frequently obliged to cheat. This is so when demographic »accidents« or other causes lead to the overproduction of hereditary occupants of one kind of socio-economic role and the underproduction of the occupants of others. Such movements are also reflected through media. Thus, the media are a clear sign of the relation between the majority and the minorities in one country. The situation of the media – whether state-owned or independent – and their programmes on the languages of ethnic minorities can guide us to the core of the issue of the respect for the cultural rights of ethnic minorities, even if this is not the only sign of the general situation regarding those rights.

Ljubomir Frckovski⁸ underlines the importance of multiethnic democracy, and defines it as raising the socio-cultural and ethnic diversity of the collective bearer of a divided sovereignty. Here, we should stress the role of the media in promoting the cultural rights of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, where the media should provide enough material for

1 Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. In: IV Cluster reader. Sarajevo: ERMA 2003, p. 4f.

2 Ibid, p. 3ff.

3 Lawson, Edward: Encyclopedia of Human Rights. Washington: Taylor & Francis 1996, p. 333.

4 Ibid.

5 Wykes, Maggie: News, Crime and Culture. London: Pluto Press 2001, p. 27.

6 Gellner, Ernest: Culture, Identity and Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1987, p. 94.

7 Ibid.

8 Frckovski, Ljubomir: Model of the International relations in Macedonia. Skoplje: Krug 1998, p. 26.

9 Boyle, Kevin, Coliver, Sandra (Eds.):
Striking a Balance: Hate Speech,
Freedom of Expression and Non-
discrimination. London: Article 19
1992, p. 61.

10 Ibid.

11 Vilović, Gordana in: <http://www.mediaplan.ba>. [last visit: 26.3.2003].

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Official site: <http://www.hrw.org/wrzk3/europe5.htm>. [last visit: 25.04.2003].

15 Ibid.

16 Vilović in <http://www.mediaplan.ba>.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Putnik, Milena in: <http://www.aimpress.org> [last visit: 20.3.2003].

20 Ibid.

21 Official site: <http://www.b92.net>.

22 Frckoski 1998, p. 78.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

the understanding and respect for differences between the cultures, about their view on life, about values and advantages of different cultures living together. That is why the cultures of ethnic minorities should find representatives in media. According to Kevin Boyle,⁹ questions of balancing public order and religious harmony with the right of freedom of expression are particularly sensitive.¹⁰ In the case of former Yugoslavia, where new minorities appeared after the fall of communism, some ethnic groups who used to be majorities during the communist regime now became minorities, and *vice versa*. Moreover, cultural rights of ethnic minorities were more than sensitive, and the role of the media was dangerous before as well as during the ethnic conflicts. This situation was particularly evident in the border-areas of the republics of former Yugoslavia. However, the aim of this article is to present the appearance of ethnic minorities and their cultural rights after the ethnic conflict in the republics of former Yugoslavia.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹¹ the situation concerning the broadcasting of topics that have a direct or indirect influence on the disposition toward ethnic minorities is not positive. In the first place, this is a sign of the non-professionalism of the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The second reason for this situation can be found in the non-existence of a media culture.¹² The entire topic of human rights is weakly covered from the side of the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly so the rights of ethnic minorities.¹³ According to *Human Rights Watch*,¹⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina made some progress toward the protection of its citizens regardless of their ethnicity, and there is the potential to bring about some positive changes, although the organisation is sceptical about the final product of this potential.¹⁵

In Croatia,¹⁶ during the ethnic conflict and shortly after it almost everything that was connected with ethnic minorities was presented in a negative context in the electronic and printed media. The situation today is different. Slowly, the media are returning to a balanced and more ethical reporting about ethnic minorities. Also, minorities have their own media, mostly radio stations and print media in their own languages. The Serbian minority, who are the most important ethnic minority in Croatia,¹⁷ has several radio stations in Podunavlje, but the only television station of the Serbian ethnic minority in Croatia, *TV Dunav*, has not worked for more than two years because of financial problems. It is important to stress that this television station is a branch of the state-owned television network *HTV*. Also, many national communities in Croatia have their printed media, which are published monthly or bi-monthly. The Italian minority has the daily newspaper *La Voce del Popolo*, through which the Italians in Croatia are trying to, besides informing, maintain the spirit of their culture.¹⁸

After the political centralisation of Serbia,¹⁹ the media of ethnic minorities were reduced to a minimum, and co-operation between editorial terms on different languages, which was a regular practice in the electronic media, was gradually completely interrupted. Also, when discussing the present situation in Serbia and Montenegro, it is necessary to keep the economic situation in mind. This is so because despite the fact that minorities have a clear need for their own media, the target groups are, following the ethnic conflict, relatively small and the costs of producing their own publications are high. Nevertheless, the state supports projects founding media in the languages of ethnic minorities. With that aim of supporting minorities to found their own media, the state-owned press agency *Beta*²⁰ offers, as part of its own informative program, informative services in the Romani and Hungarian languages. Also, the visitors of the official website of the biggest independent media *B92*²¹ can choose informative services in Albanian and Hungarian, as well as Serbian and English.

In Macedonia,²² the interethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians, who are the most important ethnic minority in Macedonia, are marked by an extensive religious and confessional division. However, five newspapers are published in minority languages: Two of them are daily newspapers published in the language of the Albanian minority, two are monthly magazines in Albanian, and one is a monthly magazine in Turkish. Beside that, the Macedonian television has an Albanian broadcasting desk with a daily program of two hours. Macedonian television also broadcasts a 120-minute-long weekly documentary program in the minorities' languages. The Macedonian radio²³ broadcasts a program of fifteen hours per day in minorities' languages. Beside this, it is important to stress here that, in 1998, there existed 250 private television and radio stations in Macedonia, a great number of which were media of the Albanian minority.²⁴

However, looking at the media's picture of ethnic minorities in Europe,²⁵ one will see that



25 cf. Demmiene, Jeanette in
<http://www.ifj.org> [last visit:
26.03.2003].

research into the possibilities of international co-operation in the exchange of news as well as in the organisational field has not yet been undertaken. This leads to the conclusion that the area of former Yugoslavia is in a similar situation concerning the issue of media in the languages of ethnic minorities. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the international community tries to have a positive influence on the authorities of the republics of former Yugoslavia. Also, there are many helpful international activities with the aim of improving the picture of media in languages of ethnic minorities, and the promotion of minorities' cultural rights and values.

Conclusion

26 Cf. <http://www.yumediacentar.com>, p. 4f. [last visit: 20.03.2003].

To say that the world can exist only on the basis of mutual respect for different cultures, religions, confessions, etc. is not just a phrase. If one particular culture should be preserved, the state should, beside others mechanisms for this purpose, rely on the media to play a strong role in preserving and presenting the cultural values of different groups in this society.

In former Yugoslavia, the highest level of non-tolerance is presented through the media, directed at the biggest minorities, which are presented as a danger to national security.²⁶ This essay took on the task to present the media as a mechanism of state policy in the promotion of the cultural rights of ethnic minorities and other rights with cultural aspects, such as the rights for freedom of expression and free access of information. The media should not reflect retrospectively, but create a specific kind of diary of the present by promoting values of different cultures. As a tool for improving any field of a society's life, the media play an important role in the growing diversity of cultural initiatives among multiethnic and multicultural societies.

Today, ethnic identity and originality appear as an important issue, especially so after the ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia. Media are just tools of state policy, through which the rights of ethnic minorities, e.g. cultural rights, as well as rights of the first generation – civil and political rights – are respected.

Aida Kožar is a Journalist, University Lecturer and Actress. She studied Acting and English Literature and Languages in Priština, followed by studies in Journalism in Sarajevo and an MA in Human Rights and Democracy in South-Eastern Europe at the University of Political Science-Bologna and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies in Sarajevo.
Contact: aidakozar@yahoo.com