

RADIO AND TELEVISION OF MONTENEGRO AT THE POLITICIANS' TARGET: Courses
directed at the Public Broadcaster

Written by: Zoran Radulović

It is not uncommon for journalists and politicians to have a lack of respect towards each other- such is the nature of their jobs - yet it is extremely rare in a public place, even if it is a café or a market, to hear just a small portion of what Montenegrin politicians and then, their anonymous social media followers are capable to say about Montenegro's Radio Television (RTCG). More precisely, about the Public Broadcaster and the people who work in that media. At public gatherings, news conferences, media appearances, and even in parliament, they do not choose when or where they speak.

This is partly due to politicians' lack of understanding of the media's function. Or they are unable to accept the situation as it is. And it's all a part of the state of mind in Montenegrin society, in whose creation politicians and the media took part.

During his first Prime Minister's Hour in the Parliament of Montenegro, Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapić seized the opportunity to criticize or praise: "I am the only Prime Minister who could not be a guest (on RTCG - author's note) whenever he wanted. But, let it be, it is a measure of the moment, a measure of democracy..."

Previously, Krivokapić, along with several other members of the ruling majority in the executive and parliamentary branches, demanded that "the public broadcaster of Montenegro be reinstated to the citizens who pay for it as soon as feasible". But, more about that request a bit later.

Interestingly, his predecessor, the former Prime Minister Duško Marković, had a similar perspective on the Public Broadcaster. At least when the RTCG was not

completely under the authority of the authorities and the ruling DPS. Thus, it was noted that Marković gave his first "prime ministerial" interview to the Public Service Broadcaster only in his second year in office, in March 2018, after the DPS began the process of restoring control over RTCG by dismissing disloyal members of the Public Broadcaster's Council.

"That is not something I am interested in" Marković responded to a question about the dismissal of Council members and the appointment of new members. He then "commented for ten minutes on the reports in the main news, the content of which he was not satisfied with, especially when it comes to the treatment of the Government," according to the media that broadcasted parts of the talk. "You frequently marginalize the formal states of the Prime Minister's duties in your news" Marković rebuked his hosts. To resent the fact that his utterances and acts are juxtaposed along with the comments and observations of the so-called other side: ... "That report on my appearance was broadcasted at the same time with the remarks of the opposition leaders... " .

The current president of the state, Milo Đukanović, objected to the work of the Public Broadcaster at that time, as well. He did not present them personally, but the Public Relations services of the DPS, in which Djukanović is also the president, did so on his behalf. This is how the party spokesperson justified his absence from the debate on RTCG during the campaign for the election of the President of Montenegro (the guests were all candidates except Djukanović): "Such an unprofessional and propagandistic show only vindicated the decision of our candidate's election headquarters which was more than righteous ... and that it left enough space for other candidates to complement each other with meaningless criticism, insults and falsehoods."

Same old school. Let's not go too far into the past. Because the situation today, it seems, is worse than ever before.

Unlike his coalition partners, Prime Minister Krivokapić expressed his dissatisfaction with the work of RTCG without cursing or insults, even though some members of his team, while he was Prime Minister-Designate, urged the Public Broadcaster employees "to react and condemn their colleague" Duška Pejović. In their opinion, Pejović because of (we do not share the same opinion if the attitude of someone who has been living from what he writes in domestic and foreign media for three decades has some weight) "violation of journalistic ethics

aiming to incite religious and national hatred". In a much quieter manner, the same persons tried to distance themselves from the extremely inappropriate hunt that was then led against my colleague Pejović on social media, in the local media under the patronage of part of the ruling coalition, and on the pages of tabloids from Serbia.

That is why Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazović, from September until today, "painted" RTCG with a whole series of severe qualifications and insults. Beginning with the assessment that RTCG is not a public broadcaster but a disgusting propaganda house and the DPS apparatus in which the situation is cataclysmic, to the viewpoint he shared : "I am ashamed of RTCG, it is the media which polarizes, electrifies the atmosphere, pushes people into conflicts ...".

Abazović declared part of what he conveyed as a guest at the Public Broadcaster, and part in the parliament. In his address to the Assembly, the subject was the government's fight against corruption and organized crime, the Deputy Prime Minister concluded with the following: "People (RTCG journalists - author's note) have been creating a situation for 200 days as if a war is about to start." That is the opposite role of what the Public Broadcaster should do. And concluded with something that, at least stylistically, could be classified as a malediction: "If the Assembly does not have the strength to change the Council (RTCG), then it should not exist at all".

Abazović then tried to soften what he conveyed: "This is my personal opinion as a citizen and politician to which I have the right." Still, if we ignore the fact that every opinion is personal, or at least it should be, the part about the right of citizens and politicians (in power) to curse and execrate could be the subject of serious debate. From family upbringing to abuse of power. Perhaps, exactly at the Public Broadcaster.

To compound the problem, Abazović's interpretation completely coincided with the views of some members of the ruling majority. So, we heard from them that RTCG is a "lair related to mafia structures" in which "reimbursement was received in proportion to the hatred sown" (Democrat's MP Boris Bogdanović). That the Public Broadcaster is a "brutal media, which incites hatred, and that the majority of journalists working in that media are sycophants." There are professionals there, but they are marginalized. Everything that happened with the Public Broadcaster is disgraceful ... "(MP of the Movement for Changes, Branka Bošnjak).

It is enough to watch shortly (because watching for a long time is unhealthy) certain shows and interviews that have only been broadcasted recently, to ascertain that the media, which is being funded by all citizens, including Serbs, is finally at its lowest, and that what it is doing now is purely provoking the majority of the people ... ", stated DF MP Jovan Vučurović explaining the role of the RTCG, who is also, the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Human and Minority Rights. While the SNP MP Milosava Paunović called the staff of RTCG the vermin of the society "because you did everything to create discord and hatred in our multiethnic and multicultural environment".

These are just short excerpts from a debate that did not begin yesterday, and which has made the Public Broadcaster and its employees a "legitimate target" on which anyone, whenever they want, can spit or hit with all their vigor. Without having a fear that it will be condemned more seriously in public.

A couple of NGOs and media associations, not all and not always, go public with a statement. Private media (do not) publish it and that is - the end of the story. Only in extreme situations, such as verbal and physical assaults in the workplace which were experienced by Ivana Šebek and Nebojša Šofranac or harangue, serious threats of violence and had to run the gauntlet of the media through which the known and unknown treated Duška Pejović and the authors of the documentary about Amfilohije Radović Tanja Šuković and Snežana Rakonjac, only few politicians give statements. With the obligatory BUT followed by lessons on the journalism profession. Or an artisan. Following the principle by which, Little Johnny imagines a job he has no idea about.

Asking: if the Public Broadcaster and its journalists deserved such treatment would be the same as debating whether the former informants deserved to be sent to Goli Otok. Indecent, indeed. RTCG journalists are not obliged to endure everything-good or bad, that local politicians are ready to tell them when commenting how they do their job. After all, let us recall how the ruling majority ranted when the current Prime Minister addressed them with an insulting half-sentence.

It is a different subject how much the Public Broadcaster is meritorious for creating a social atmosphere in which it is quite "natural" to replace the debate and arguments with curses and personal insults. This is not a matter of the current editorial policy. We know both the better and the worse. We are talking about the public speech of the Public Broadcaster. When the current management argues with the President of the Assembly, and in that polemic says: "Instead of arguing

with your low-class press service officials, who you try to set up, we will ask you a few questions ...", then they give others the right to communicate similarly with them and their colleagues. Low-class.

The same happened when in the prime time of RTCG we hear a journalist asking her interlocutor an offensive question to, perhaps not the most important fact to a country being friendly with us: "Is it possible for such a large country to send such an ambassador to Montenegro? (no one even remembers the answer). Then, hours and days of a quality program - investigative (Mechanism), documentary, or sports - are futile. Someone will probably ask: is it possible for such a big television...

And that's not the worst, either. "You, who have been part of this shame and irresponsibility - you are accomplices in the embarrassment and disgrace and the lowest decline of the journalistic profession!" When the honest times come, you will have to explain who, why and on whose behalf? One day you will have to confront with the honesty and you will not be able to endure the look because of the shame! Viciousness always ends in shame! We know each other, beasts! " This is how the former journalist of the Public Broadcaster, and potentially the editor at the same place in the future, commented on the work of her colleagues on her Facebook profile - that is, in the public space - at the beginning of last year.

The same show, in the same place (Facebook), is described by another colleague as "misdeed", "shame and professional disgrace", "clumsily hidden ordered creation of the so-called TV show ", "unprecedented journalistic pornography". The quotes were taken from the media, which, as of tomorrow, conveyed these "expert reviews".

Disciplinary proceedings against the "critics" were suspended due to the statute of limitations. Although in this pornography, to paraphrase a "colleague", almost invariably, you can find all the most shameful insults that politicians have uttered in the past 365 days against RTCG and its employees. They just didn't cite the sources. That is the reason why the Montenegrin media, together with the Public Broadcaster, with some exceptions, are quite responsible for how journalism and journalists are talked about in Montenegro.

The solution, of course, does not lie in the proclaimed idea of reinstating of the Public Broadcaster "to those who pay for it", as government officials urge these days. To be clear, their predecessors did the same. Just with less noise. Because

that means that politicians, self-proclaimed "representatives of the people", govern the national television. On the same principle by which they are already editing, or trying to edit, private and local media. And the role of the Public Service Broadcaster is not to serve the authorities, beautify and marginalize their deeds, but to inform, educate, empower the community, promote and affirm the values of civil society ... All this is detailed in Article 9 (Obligations and responsibilities of RTCG - services from of public interest) of the Law on National Public Broadcaster RTCG, which was adopted in July last year. Worth reading. Then change it if you can for the better. No hard words.

The idea of "reinstating of the Public Broadcaster" is controversial from another perspective. At the end of May, the results of the research carried by the Ipsos agency for the needs of the Media Institute of Montenegro were published. According to this survey, 48 percent of respondents believe that the Public Service Broadcaster provides them with accurate, complete, and balanced information. And 48 percent think differently. RTCG is funded by both. This means that simply replacing "ours" with "theirs" will not solve the problems. Which are obvious. But curses are not helpful.

This article was brought to you with the financial support of the European Union and the National Endowment for Democracy. The content is the sole responsibility of the authors and publishers of the Media Institute of Montenegro and does not necessarily reflect the views of benefactors.