

Tea Gorjanc-Prelević, *Human Rights Action executive director*

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the presentation of the Human Rights Action's second report on monitoring of self-regulation in the media in Montenegro.

We received yesterday sad news of the death of Nelson Mandela, a prominent human rights activist for a free and democratic society. It seems that those who are willing to commit their lives to protection of rights of others, to put them selfishly above safeguarding first their own rights, are becoming extinct. He was such a person and will remain an inspiration to us all. I invite you to honour Nelson Mandela with a moment of silence. May he rest in peace.

It is my pleasure present to you Mr. Ian Whitting, the new British Ambassador to Montenegro, who is here with us today. The British Embassy in Montenegro, the British Foreign Office and the Open Society Foundation supported the implementation of this two-year project within which HRA monitors the new phase of self-regulation in the media in Montenegro, after the Journalist Self-Regulatory Body stopped its operations in April 2010, a body that gathered almost all the most influential media in Montenegro.

The Media Council for Self-Regulation (MSS), a body bringing together 22 media outlets, but whose authority do not accept dailies Dan, Vijesti, TV Vijesti and the weekly Monitor, currently deals with self-regulation in the media. But, as we noted in the previous report, this does not stop MSS from assessing the reporting of these media outlets.

In January 2013, TV Vijesti established its internal Ombudsman, and appointed Ms. Aida Ramusović, who was prior to this post a reporter and editor in this media organization.

Dan, Vijesti and Monitor originally registered the Press Council as their joint self-regulatory body, but it never started to operate.

Instead, Vijesti recently informed the public that it has established an internal Ombudsman, and that Professor Božena Jelušić, a prominent civic activist from Budva, was selected for the post as a person outside the media and editorial board.

Since only daily Dan and weekly Monitor remain outside of any self-regulation process, we recommended they opt for some form of self-regulation as soon as possible.

During the presentation of the previous report in April this year, we concluded that it would be necessary to monitor the ethics in reporting of broadcast media (television and radio), and with the support of the Open Society Foundation and Marijana Buljan, media expert (who worked as an editor at the BBC, Croatian and Montenegrin media), we have managed to organize monitoring of primetime

television shows of five most watched TV stations in Montenegro. Marijana will present some interesting results on those activities.

I would like to explain why we decided to implement this project, which the editors of Montenegrin media probably do not like, and especially the Media Council for Self-Regulation. We are confident that the critical supervision of this new phase of self-regulation in the media in Montenegro is worth the risk of unpopularity of our organization among some editors. We expect that our reports would eventually serve as an incentive to the development of media self-regulation, which is very important for objective informing of citizens and the development of the culture of human rights in the Montenegrin society. We have the legitimate right to deal with it as an association of citizens, because citizens have the right to be properly informed and to require from the media to inform them responsibly. This obligation has special significance in relation to public services, RTCG and Pobjeda, which are state-owned, i.e. directly funded by the public.

The Media Council for Self-Regulation does not have a representative at this meeting. Unfortunately, despite our efforts, we failed to establish proper cooperation with that organization. The Council perceived our previous report as hostile, it did not invite us to the presentation of their reports, it did not send their reports to us, until it finally published them on its website in September, after we insisted several times, and we were not invited to the controversial conference that the Council recently organized on the ethics of journalism and freedom of expression under the title „Word, image and the enemy“. Therefore, we got the impression that the Council has given itself the right to monitor the operation of media outlets that do not recognize its authority more easily than to come with terms with our intention to monitor its operation.

Finally, as an introduction to the discussion, I would like to point out one of the topics that we perceived as important in the analysis of ethical conduct of the media, and that is the relationship between ethics and respect for freedom of editorial policy. Specifically, in addition to the first principle, according to which “duty of a journalist is to respect the truth and persistently search for it, having in mind a right of the public to be informed and human need for justice and humanity”, the Code of Montenegrin Journalists, in Article 2 contains a principle that prescribes that “a journalist should be sharp observer of those who have social, political and economic power”. This second principle does not usually exist as a rule in international codes of journalistic ethics, because the extent of being critical and provocative towards the government and other powerful persons is primarily a property of editorial policy, which attracts particular audiences, more or less public trust and it is not something that can or should be expected from every media and every journalist. Therefore, we again suggested that this principle should at least be more specified through guidelines of the Code, in order to make it clear under what circumstances the journalists should be expected to apply it. I will conclude my remarks here and hope that we will get back to this topic later in the discussion...