

ATTACK ON FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA IN  
THE CONTEXT OF THREATS TO MEDIA FREEDOM

Introduction

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According to the report of the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman/Ombudsmen, in Bosnia and Herzegovina there has been an increase in the number of journalists, but that it is not accompanied by any improvement of their position<sup>1</sup>. Economic stagnation, political divisions and pressures, dysfunctional institutions, nontransparent media ownership, the pressure on public services and the financial insecurity of a large number of private media creates an unfavorable framework for freedom of expression and professional work of media employees. This leads to a decline of citizens' trust in media, which should and is expected to be one of the pillars of a democratic society. The upward trend regarding the number of on-line media, the changes and challenges with which the so-called traditional media face, also contribute to creation of an insecure environment for the journalistic profession, both in terms of quality due to high competition and in the context of media freedom as well.

The bad position of journalists is often connected with the concept of a so called feminization of certain professions. Namely, the increasing number of women entering the particular profession is followed by negative phenomena such as job insecurity, the decline of "reputation" of a certain profession, reduced wages and other benefits, which points out at the existence of misogynist social environment where gender equality is an exception rather than a rule. On the other hand, women occupy only 30% of the management jobs in the BiH media<sup>2</sup>. This does not mean that female journalists are therefore necessarily more vulnerable and are more exposed to attacks and other forms of pressure and freedom threats. But certainly they are less empowered to report such cases. Therefore the existing reports handling such complaints are supposed to be incomplete and also not gender-disaggregated as well.

If we take into account the pressures and threats faced by the women in managerial positions in media, for example in local radio stations, the gender dimension of the attack is not directly related to the women's position in the media. It should be noted that women are at the 60% of editorial positions at radio stations around the country

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<sup>1</sup> Institucija ombudsmena/ombudsmana za ljudska prava Bosne i Hercegovine, Specijalni izvještaj o položaju i slučajevima prijetnji novinarima u Bosni i Hercegovini, Banja Luka, 2017, p. 27

<sup>2</sup> <http://media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/zene-na-samo-30-posto-rukovodecih-pozicija-u-bh-medijima>

and in the analyzed period (2013-2017) they were also exposed to various political pressures and attacks<sup>3</sup>.

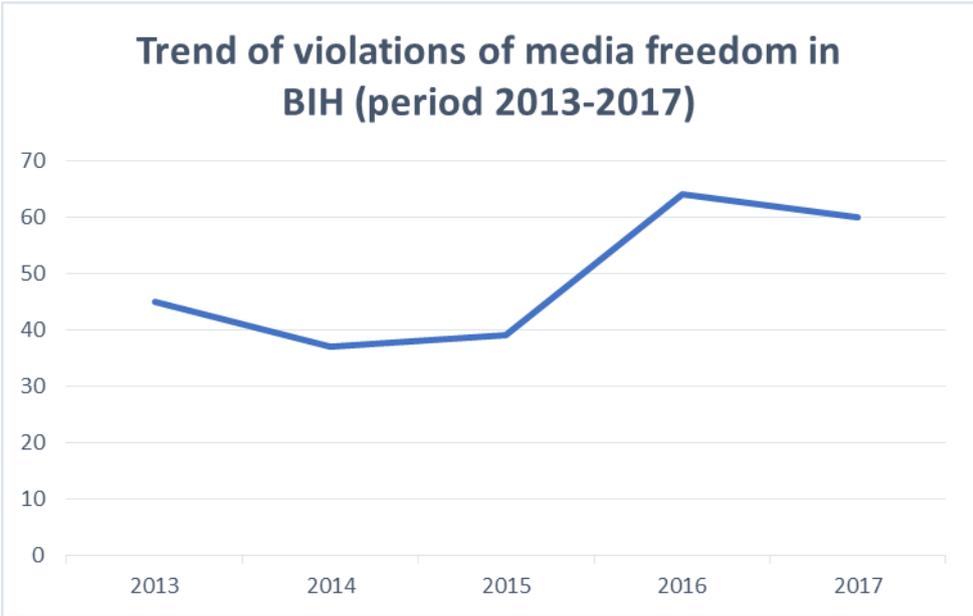
For these and other reasons, it is difficult to do a more complete and deeper analysis based on sex / gender and accompanying nuances. According to some stands, this can paradoxically reproduce binary patriarchal norms, values, and for-givens. But as the society is more conservative, gender differences and experiences will be more pronounced. This gender gap is especially present in journalism, bearing in mind that other spheres of which the freedom of media expression depends on, are also dominated by men (politics, economy, security forces, etc.). .

### OVERVIEW AND SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

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As it is often stated, the attacks on journalists are one of the main indicators of freedom of the press in a society. According to Reporters without Borders, BiH has recorded constant decline in recent years in terms of media freedom, although according to some points of view it has the most liberal laws in the region. This is particularly problematic because the respect of other rights and freedoms is largely conditioned by media freedoms. As women in BiH are still a vulnerable category of population through which various forms of discrimination intersect and overlap such negative trend further aggravates the situation of female media employees.

According to the information available due to the Free Media Help Line (FMHL) run by the BiH Journalists' Association there has been an increase in the number of violations of media freedom in the last two years (Graph. 1).



<sup>3</sup> For example in Goražde, Zenica, Bihać, Kostajnica.

Graph. 1: Trend of violations of media freedom in the period 2013-2017 based on available data from *Free Media Help Line* (FMHL) by BiH Journalists' Association

The official institutions give different answers to this problem, considering that there are no institutional mechanisms and available budgets for monitoring, reporting and taking appropriate measures for the protection of journalists<sup>4</sup>. It has also been reported that the institutions themselves, that is to say their representatives were generators of such attacks in some cases, contributing also to the unfavorable social climate in the society for journalism as a profession (e.g., reported cases of arrest<sup>5</sup>, preventing and threatening to reporters during their work<sup>6</sup>, pressing of charges for defamation against journalists<sup>7</sup>, etc.). A special problem is that institutions in charge of protection and promotion of gender equality- The Agency for Gender Equality at state level and Gender Centers at the entity level, probably due to political and other influences do not react in cases of attacks on female journalists. Also, there are no special procedures to deal with attacks on women, including women journalists<sup>8</sup>, reinforcing in that way their disadvantaged position.

The OSCE manual named *Safety of Journalists* reads that journalists, editors and media owners are obliged to take appropriate measures to protect and reduce risks to a minimum. But as it was already pointed out, men dominate in these positions. Activists for women civil scene in BIH society state that when women find themselves in managerial positions in the media, political and other pressures are further amplified. In one of the filed cases, Dragana Midžić, a female journalist, director and editor of the local Radio Kostajnica was sacked from office without any explanation due to political pressures<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, the effectiveness of mentioned measures, however, "depends crucially on whether countries fulfill own obligations to protect journalists and enable them to do their job"<sup>10</sup>. As public sphere is predominantly viewed as a masculine domain, the marginalization of female journalists and gender gaps and imbalances within the profession therefore are reinforced, being interwoven with other aspects of unequal distribution of power. This relationship is not linear considering that numerous pressures on the editorial policy of certain media are linked to the broader social context and divisions of public spheres

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<sup>4</sup> Rea Adilagić, *Indikatori nivoa medijskih sloboda i sigurnosti novinara* (Bosna i Hercegovina), udruženje/Udruga BH novinari, Sarajevo, 2016, p. 22

<sup>5</sup> Free Media Help Line (FMHL), 2013, Case No. 11

<sup>6</sup> <http://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2017/09/23/protest-federalnoj-upravi-policije-zbog-prijetnji-novinarima-rse-tv-liberty/>

<sup>7</sup> FMHL, 2016, Case No. 23

<sup>8</sup> Rea Adilagić, *ibid*, p. 24

<sup>9</sup> FMHL (Free Media Help Line), 2013, Case 15

<sup>10</sup> Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *OEBS Priručnik o bezbednosti novinara*, Vienna, 2012, p. 27

along ethnic, political and party / partocratic lines. As one of the interviewed female activist notes:

"Female journalist share the fate of media and journalism ..., and this is already one additional level of the threat to freedom".

The United States Department of State report regarding the human rights in BiH in 2016, reads that "According to data from the BiH Journalists' Association covering 2006 to 2015 authorities prosecuted only 15 percent of reported criminal acts committed against journalists and investigated less than one-third of all cases alleging violation of journalists' rights"<sup>11</sup>. Therefore it can be said that although violence against media employees is rising, the authorities continue to react and resolve these cases slowly, which leads to the further deterioration of freedom of speech and press<sup>12</sup>.

Due to the bad practices and increasing trend of violations of media freedom, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees subsequently prepared a report on media freedom in BiH, which was further considered and adopted at the 118th meeting of the Council of Ministers, held on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017. It was acknowledged by the BiH Journalists' Association in terms of a greater willingness of the institutions to deal with this issue. Yet, despite mentioned steps taken in cooperation with the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, committees in the parliaments etc., reactions of the institutions and their officials in cases of attacks on journalists is considered as being not satisfactory<sup>13</sup>.

When it comes to the given report it provides only summary data, and particular problem is that the institutions do not keep separate records regarding the attack on journalists<sup>14</sup>. The reason for such situation, as it is noted, lies in the fact that the authorities do not keep records organized by profession, and this is also confirmed in the mentioned report by the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman/Ombudsmen in BiH<sup>15</sup>. Also, the records are not gender-disaggregated, making it more difficult to combat these negative social phenomena. Given that a large number of attacks on female journalists also have gender dimension, such practices additionally do not provide any information on the cases of violation of the Law on Gender Equality as well as Law on Prohibition of Discrimination.

According to the report of Ministry for Human Rights only SIPA, MUP FBiH, RS Ministry of Interior and the Police of Brcko District have data relating to pressures

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265614.pdf>, p. 9

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Rea Adilagić, *ibid*, p. 23

<sup>14</sup> Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbjeglice u Bosni i Hercegovini, Izvještaj o slobodi govora i stanju medijskih sloboda u Bosni i Hercegovini, Broj: 05-07-1-2634-10/17, Sarajevo, 20.10.2017, p. 13, 14

<sup>15</sup> Institucija ombudsmena/ombudsmana za ljudska prava Bosne i Hercegovine (2017): Specijalni izvještaj o položaju i slučajevima prijetnji novinarima u Bosni i Hercegovini, p. 10

and intimidation, and what should be the practice for other institutions such as the prosecutor's office, the judiciary<sup>16</sup> ... So FBiH MUP recorded in 2015 three journalists complaints- threats via social networks, and in 2016 two reports - unauthorized access to a protected system of electronic processing of data which are used by journalists. There were also so-called obstructions of portals by DDoS attacks. MUP RS 2015 has recorded six instances of an act of endangering the safety of journalists, coarse insults and physical attacks and threats via cell phone<sup>17</sup>. But these data have not been categorized by sex/gender although article 18/section XII of the Law on Gender Equality reads:

- All statistical data and information collected, recorded and processed by all state bodies at all levels, in public offices and institutions, state and private companies, and other subjects, should be gender-disaggregated.
- Statistical data and information collected, recorded and processed pursuant to Paragraph 1 of this Article, shall be part of statistical records and shall be available to the public.

Yet, indicated records are not gender-disaggregated. Further on, they provide less information about attacks on journalists in comparison with the information available by Free Media Help Line, which regularly runs BiH Journalists' Association on the basis of received complaints. Among the problems, it is often stated that the attacks on journalists under BiH criminal law are not a separate offense. This hinders not only their adequate treatment by the officials but also the adequate keeping of statistical and other records, including the gender aspect.

What is also worrying is that the so called Shadow reports on \_the state of women's rights in BiH, where the analysis is about, for example the status of women in the sphere of labor and employment, politics, and family, and the presence of violence against women, female journalists are practically invisible. Although these reports that non-governmental organizations for women regularly provide tend to be more general and to include some of the most striking cases, given the importance of the media as mediators between politicians and citizens and the mentioned trend of feminization of journalistic profession, this aspect should be addressed. Women's organizations in own documents and reports often refer to the laws and the duty of the media to promote gender equality, without sufficient reflection on the conditions in which journalists work, although it does not mean that they are not aware of it. Specifically, "women's issues" are still on the margins of media coverage, which is associated with the editorial policy where the female journalists are, as already noted, marginalized and

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<sup>16</sup> Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbjeglice u Bosni i Hercegovini, *ibid*, p. 14

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13

also because of the broader social context. Women's organizations in BiH mostly react *ad hoc* in cases of attacks on female journalists, for this is predominantly left to journalists' associations. As was pointed out by one of the activists interviewed on this matter:

"We react, but in my opinion, not enough and we do not have strategically defined approach ..."

Although female journalists in some cases approach women's associations for support, they, as one activist stated, as a rule do not do so. Their appeal for the protection goes first to the particular media outlet they are working for and also professional associations. For this reason, a stronger connection between female journalists and women's civil society organizations should be reinforced, in order to establish more effective protection and empowerment. Especially considering that women's organizations through various project activities provide information on the protection and legal assistance<sup>18</sup>. One of the activists pointed out as a special problem that the media do not publish their reactions and statements after the attacks on female journalists which create the illusion in the public that the women's organizations are lethargic on the matter.

## **FORMS OF ATTACKS**

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### **I. Political pressures and attacks**

Politicians and political officials are one of the main perpetrators while speaking of attacks on journalists and violations of media freedoms in general (Figure. No 4). This creates an unfavorable atmosphere in which such behavior is allowed and politically profitable. When drafting the report on the situation of the cases of threats against journalists, the Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman/men sent a questionnaire to all parties and coalitions represented in BiH Parliament, and the answers came only from the SDS and HDZ. The mere fact that eleven political entities did not respond<sup>19</sup> is also an indicator of a bad political climate for the media and the lack of political concern for the state of media freedom.

Political pressures are manifested in different ways- such as public denouncement of certain media, the (ab)use of political influences and connections in order to prevent advertising in certain media, shutting down the portals, the adoption of

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<sup>18</sup> <http://zenskamreza.ba/zastita-zena-od-polnerodne-diskriminacije-od-zakona-do-stvarne-ravnopravnosti/>

<sup>19</sup> Institucija ombudsmena/ombudsmana za ljudska prava Bosne i Hercegovine Specijalni izvještaj o položaju i slučajevima prijetnji novinarima u Bosni i Hercegovini, Banja Luka, 2017, p. 33

controversial laws<sup>20</sup>, verbal threats and pressures. Also, it is assumed that the hacker attacks on some portals have a political connotation, since they are mostly used against the portals that in a critical and analytical way report about political processes in society. Numerous political pressures lead to the appearance of a self-censorship which had to lead a deterioration of the public reputation of journalistic profession at the cost of the political culture of the society in general.

As it was stated in the above mentioned report of the State Department, the political leaders are inclined to label every criticism in media of their work as a hate speech or a national treason<sup>21</sup>. For example, in March 2013 on the official website of SNSD there appeared a list of unsuitable journalists, the media and non-governmental organizations being labelled as foreign mercenaries and destroyers of constitutional order and the existence of the Republic of Srpska<sup>22</sup>.

BiH Journalists' Association in February 2013 released a statement expressing concern that "Milorad Dodik systematically since 2007. Has verbally assaulted and threatened journalists at Federal TV, BHRT, ATV, Oslobodjenje, TV BN, the Beta News Agency." .. Milorad Dodik is particularly inclined to verbally attack female journalists, in an extremely chauvinistic and misogynistic way, especially when posing questions and initiating issues connected with his political work. Thus, after the TV BN published information on assets that Dodik owns in The Republic of Srpska and in neighboring Serbia, it was followed by the attack on the editor of BN TV Susanna Raden Todorović<sup>23</sup>. In his verbal attacks on female journalists, the President of RS often uses tactics such as the denunciation of media the journalist works for, putting the emphasis on her national affiliation with the aim of concealing the subconscious misogyny in order to affirm himself as the subject of masculine political power. After a verbal attack on a female journalist from N1 during the New Year's reception at the Palace of the President of the Republic, calling and labelling her and media outlet she works for as an 'enemy', the Board of BIH Journalists' Association on 26 December 2016 noted in the statement that "especially worrisome is the fact that the usual targets of Milorad Dodik are female journalists, of which in the last ten years there were 17 cases of the president's insults, harassment and defamation aimed at them just because they were female journalists. "

In the period of 2013-2017, the overview of political pressures, threats and verbal assaults by politicians are presented in Graph. No 2. It should be noted that some cases had the form of political pressure, some of a pressure accompanied by verbal

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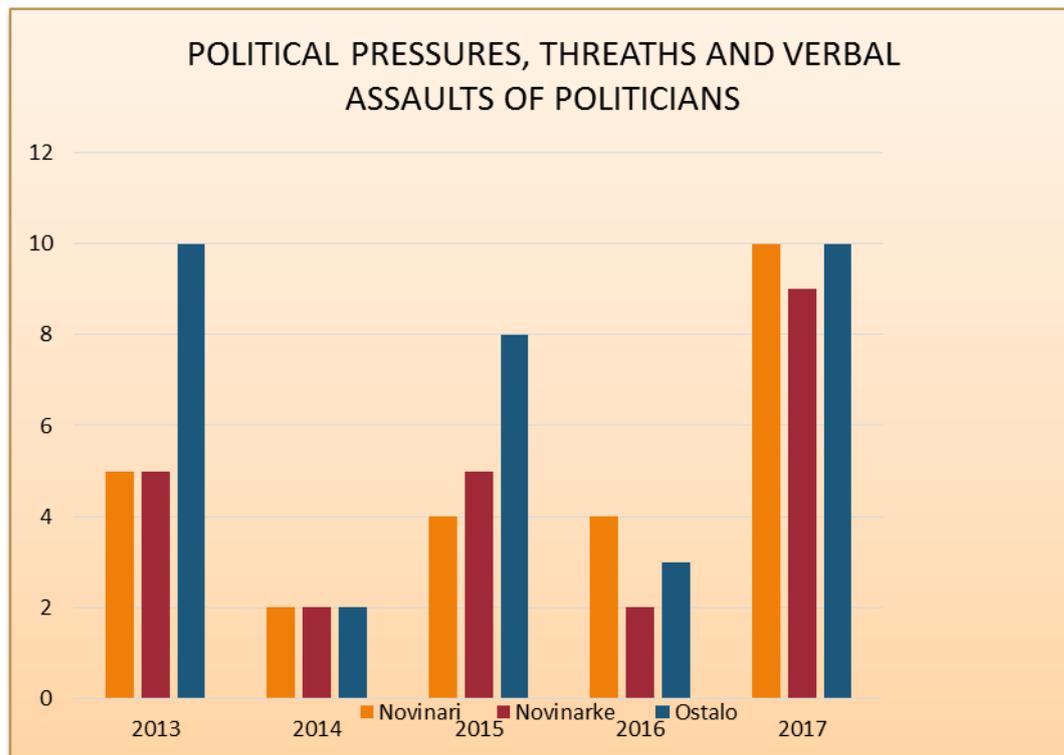
<sup>20</sup> „In the RS, authorities sporadically implemented a controversial 2015 law that declared that internet-based social networks were part of the public domain and provided fines for “insulting or disturbing” content, not clearly defined, published on the internet“ , <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265614.pdf>, p. 12

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265614.pdf>, p. 10

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265614.pdf>, p. 10

<sup>23</sup> FMHL, 2013, Case No. 5

attacks and threats, and some of “mere” verbal attacks. Bearing in mind that there is a "thin line", for the sake of transparency and better overview they are presented summarized (Figure. 2).



Graph No 2: Political pressures, threats and verbal assaults of politicians on male and female journalists.

Verbal attacks, political pressures and insults directed at female journalists often have more or less a misogynic character. According to Ljiljana Zurovac, executive Director at the Press Council of BIH these insults present a sort of pleasure for some politicians and public servants. This is also supported by the fact that virtually no recorded cases of political pressures, assaults and threats towards journalists which were initiated by female politicians ever existed. As was pointed out by one of the interviewed activists:

"The gender dimension is reflected through the content of the offense, which is different from the insults addressed to a male journalist...The offence addressed to female journalists will have contents related to her gender, she will be insulted both as a woman and as a person doing her job. The verbal attack on female journalist will include, for example, comments relating to her appearance, age or any allusion to her love life, details of her private life, which is not the case with the attacks on men..."

Politicians are not bothered if the messages they are sending to female journalists do not have any even quasi-logical explanation. But logic is not necessary since all violence, including the verbal one, as Hannah Arendt pointed out, is

something which is 'dumb' and meaningless. It does not allow any communication with the so-called "Object" it aims against<sup>24</sup>. One of such cases is a FB status of Samir Kaplan who, in the July 2016 accused General Secretary of the BiH Journalists' Association Borka Rudic, after a failed coup in Turkey, to be a follower of Gulen movement. After that, numerous verbal attacks against Borka Rudic followed. As was pointed out in the statement issued by the Association: "After outbursts of hatred on Facebook and stating the unsubstantiated charges "for being lobbyist of Gulen Movement and the person who defends Chetniks, Borka Rudic was verbally attacked in Sarajevo ... which can be considered as a direct consequence of the accusations initiated by Samir Kaplan..."<sup>25</sup> Bearing in mind that this is a hate speech aimed at an individual that works for and represents the association, which among other things, is in charge of the protection of the rights and freedom of the media, the effects of such public statements by politician are far-reaching.

As could be seen in the chart above, 2017 represents the culmination when it comes to political pressure, attacks and insults against the media and media employees. Attacks on female journalists are not always clearly expressed in gender connotation, but are more connected with the policy of certain media outlets and the way of work of female journalists and their treatment of political issues. As stated in the independent news agency BIRN, BiH political parties have divided the public sphere and have gained control over the major information outlets, favoring ones and disqualifying others. It was also pointed out as the biggest problem by interviewed activists. Attacks on female journalists are therefore placed in the context of the attacks on the policy of certain media outlets, in which the gender dimension is added as a "spice" or in order to conceal the real motive of the attack. Partocratic context is evident in the cases of verbal attacks by Security Minister Dragan Mektic against female journalists at RTRS and *Glas Srpske*, in October 2015 in Banja Luka<sup>26</sup>. And, in the most dramatic way in numerous attacks by Milorad Dodik on female journalist's that are working for media outlets that are not under his control. In that way, and in the context of ethnically and partocratically divided public sphere, we have various forms of intersection and overlapping of discrimination based on ethnic, territorial, gender and other so called protected characteristics.

The case of verbal attacks from the President of the National Assembly of Republic of Srpska on Gordana Katana, a correspondent of *Oslobodjenje*, attacking at the same time the male journalist from *Dnevni Avaz*, is an example of intersection of political, territorial and other forms of divisions and intolerances currently operating in

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<sup>24</sup> Svjetlana Nedimović, Govor nasilja i društveno isključivanje, preuzeto sa: <http://www.media.ba/bs/medijska-politika-regulativa-teme-i-resursi/govor-nasilja-i-drustveno-iskljucivanje>

<sup>25</sup> <http://media.ba/bs/vijesti-i-dogadaji-vijesti/napad-i-hajka-na-borku-rudic-i-clanove-bh-novinara-nakon-optuzbi-salmira>

<sup>26</sup> <http://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2015/10/13/protest-zbog-verbalnih-napada-na-novinarke-rtrs-a-i-qglasa-srpskeq/>

BiH society. On the other hand, the President of the Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik in March 2015 attacked and insulted the same female journalist in an extremely chauvinistic and misogynist way. In this regard, the Association of BH Journalists has issued a statement in which, inter alia, it states: "Speaking in a masculine, vulgar and racist way about the way she looks, her ethnicity and the media outlet she works for, the president of RS and SNSD brutally violated the rights of Gordana Katana to a free and decent work as a journalist, publically spat on her national and human rights as a woman and at the same time proclaimed his discriminatory attitude towards the newspaper *Oslobodjenje*, of which the distribution he personally prohibited in the RS institutions... "<sup>27</sup>. In a vulgar and male chauvinistic way by using the word "liar", and the phrase "what are you doing here," Dodik in 2012 attacked the female journalist of Beta News Agency, Ljiljana Kovačević, and similarly to that he was "communicating" with a female journalist from BN TV Ljiljana Faladžić after visiting Semberija 2014 during the catastrophic floods. First verbally and then physically, by pounding his fist onto the microphone in her hand and pushing through with his own security in order to prevent the recording of statements<sup>28</sup>. This and similar examples of verbal and nonverbal communication is a clear message that politics is a male domain with which women should not interfere, such as in case of the female journalists e.g. by posing certain questions. The political pressure on female journalists is also reflected in the prevention of providing information, instead of which we have misogynist insults, the withdrawal of accreditation, removing from mailing lists...<sup>29</sup>

As Ljiljana Zurovac, Executive Director at the Press Council in Bosnia-Herzegovina pointed out:

"When a female journalist poses a provocative question or at least the person to whom the question is addressed considers it provocative - public figures try to avoid response and have a recourse to primitive methods of verbal attacks, which demonstrate a deep misogyny, trying first of all to shake her up as a woman and a reporter, to crush her confidence in what she does. The aim is to disrupt her equilibrium and to disbalance her, because as a journalist she must be firm, determined, to be someone who dares to ask questions of public concern. We had drastic cases of humiliation of female journalists in this way and it is extremely worrying that this has become a common practice. It is something to which all media community should respond. So, despite the fact that we have a political and economic pressure on the media in general, now we have a "novelty" - the withholding of

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/bh-novinari-protest-povodom-napada-na-gordanu-katanu>

<sup>28</sup> <http://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2014/05/19/protest-miloradu-dodiku-radi-ponaanja-prema-ljiljani-faladi/>

<sup>29</sup> FMHL, 2017, case No 4

information in a rather perverse way through the attacks on female journalists who are seeking information... "30.

When it comes to political pressures and arrogance, the 2015 will be remembered for the breaking and entry of the mayor of Bihac, Emdzad Galijašević into the premises of ITC Bihac. Visibly dissatisfied and angry because of the way how the female journalist Aida Štilić reported on the construction of mini hydroelectric power plants on the Una river, the mayor sent to the journalist a series of verbal threats announcing that he would "take measures". In this regard, the Executive Board of BIH Journalists' Association and Free Media Help Line condemned this act and issued a press release in which, inter alia it is stated "It is unacceptable that the mayor Galijašević, like a robber, breaks into the newsroom of one media outlet, "solving" his personal discontent with media coverage by verbal attacks and intimidation of the female journalists, instead of using permissible and legitimate means – writing a denial or sending a letter to the editor... 31,"

Similar messages and ways of "communication" during 2017 could be seen in the public statements from the Mayor of Zenica Fuad Kasumović when he brutally insulted a female journalist at FTV Gordana Ristović- Muslija who was asking for a statement after the session of the City Council in Zenica. The highlight of misogyny by politicians and public officials represents the Facebook status of the Secretary of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the female journalists Sanela Praskevic Gadžo and Arijana Saračević Helać were called "POLOVNJAČE" ("half-good"), with series of insults about their appearance<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.media.ba/bs/magazin-novinarstvo/ljiljana-zurovac-napadi-na-novinarke-postali-su-posebna-poslastica>

<sup>31</sup> <http://avaz.ba/vijesti/187151/osuden-napad-gradonacelnika-bihaca-galijasevica-na-novinarku-ftv-aidu-stilic>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/sanela-prasovic-pisala-predsjednistvu-bih-visoki-drzavni-sluzbenik-dzenan-selimbegovic-pljuje-po-zenama>



Source: Oslobođenje, December 3rd, <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/sanela-prasovic-pisala-predsjednistvu-bih-visoki-drzavni-sluzbenik-dzenan-selimbegovic-pljuje-po-zenama>

One research by the BH Journalists' Association, conducted in cooperation with the German foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, gave striking data according to which every fourth respondent from RS considered attacks on journalists as justified! Although it is difficult to give any logical explanation for such attitudes, it is certain that political pressure on the media and media employees lead to the deterioration of political and social climate for professional journalism. Also, the inaction of the institutions at the arrogant behavior and ways of communication of certain politicians with journalists, the media and the public contribute to a climate in which journalists are people who not only deserve such behavior but are also the cause of it. From the gender aspect, particularly problematic is the passivity of the Agency for Gender Equality at the state level and Gender Centers at the entity level, which implicitly indicates the politicizing of these important institutions established for the promotion of gender equality in the society and in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality.

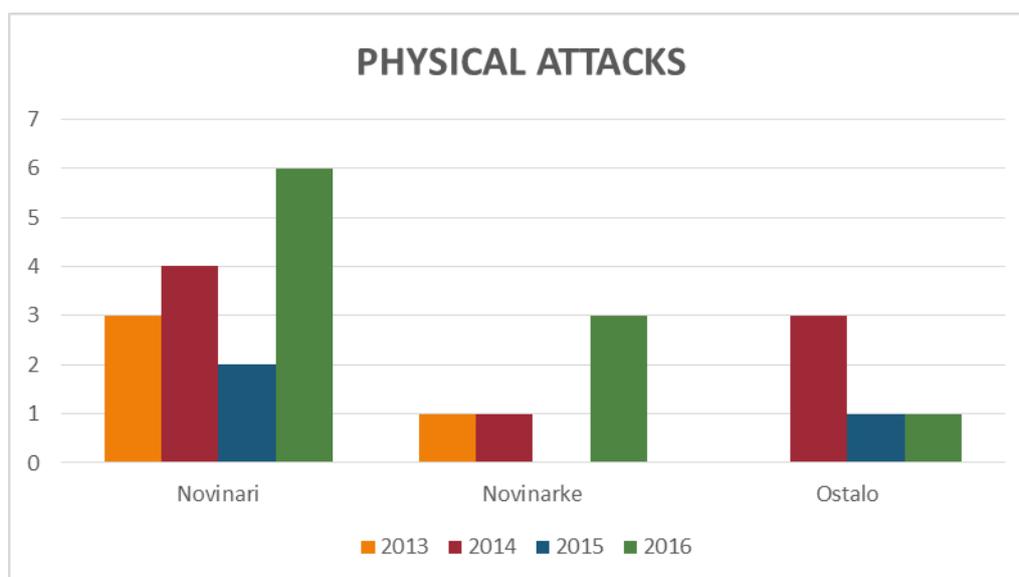
Bearing in mind that the BIH society is propatriarchal and traditional, with imposed definitions of public and private sphere and gender roles within, sexist and misogynist ways of communication of certain politicians with female journalists represent only the top of the iceberg of gender inequality. At the same time this raises the question, as noted by the female journalist Zeljka Javorac working for *Euroblic*, that many more threats were uttered, but were not recorded and *no one knows about*

*them*<sup>33</sup> (italics ZPM). Interviewed activists emphasized that journalists rarely report these cases and keep them in the private sphere. Among the reasons they emphasized for the lack of support within the media outlet they work for, are the wider media community including journalist colleagues and inadequate reaction of the authorities. Therefore, from the feminist position it is always pointed out at the dichotomy of private/public spheres, which serves not only the further disempowerment of women but also to disguise their disadvantaged position in various spheres of the society, including journalism.

## II Physical attacks

The data available from FMHL show that verbal assaults, threats and pressures are the most common form of attack on journalists, indicating that in the last two years (2016 and 2017) the number of physical attacks and death threats increased (Figure. 3). In terms of gender, male journalists are more exposed to physical attacks than female journalists. It should be noted that category “others” include attacks on the news crews (e.g. during demonstrations in 2014<sup>34</sup>) and those were often female journalists. So, when the N1 television news crew was attacked physically during the rally of Ravna Gora Chetnik Movement near the city of Visegrad, where there were also carried fascist symbols, a female reporter from N1 was also attacked<sup>35</sup>.

In a paradoxical and tentatively perverse way, smaller number of physical attacks on female journalists confirms the discriminatory thesis of female journalists being the "weaker" sex, for who are reserved verbal ones, which does not mean less benign forms of attacks, threats and pressures.



<sup>33</sup> <http://ba.n1info.com/a107262/Vijesti/Vijesti/Napadi-na-novinare-u-BiH-Je-li-sutnja-znak-odobranja.htm>

<sup>34</sup> FMHL, 2014, case No. 8

<sup>35</sup> <http://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2016/03/14/osuda-napada-na-novinarske-ekipe-n1-i-ftv/>

Graph No 3: Physical attacks on journalists by gender, based on available data from Free Media Help Line (FMHL) by BiH Journalists' Association

It is indicative that in the period of the elections (2014 and 2016) the highest number of physical attacks was recorded, although they did not always have a political connotation. This confirms the impact of the political climate and the passions on the frequency of attacks.

Although the physical attacks on female journalists are rare, it does not mean that they should be ignored. For example, in 2016 there was recorded a case of a physical attack on the female journalist by a male colleague<sup>36</sup>. What is especially worrying is that the case of physical assault, which was accompanied by a series of threats and political pressures on Štefica Galic, the editor at the portal Tačno.net did not get a court epilogue until 2017 although dating back to 2012<sup>37</sup>.

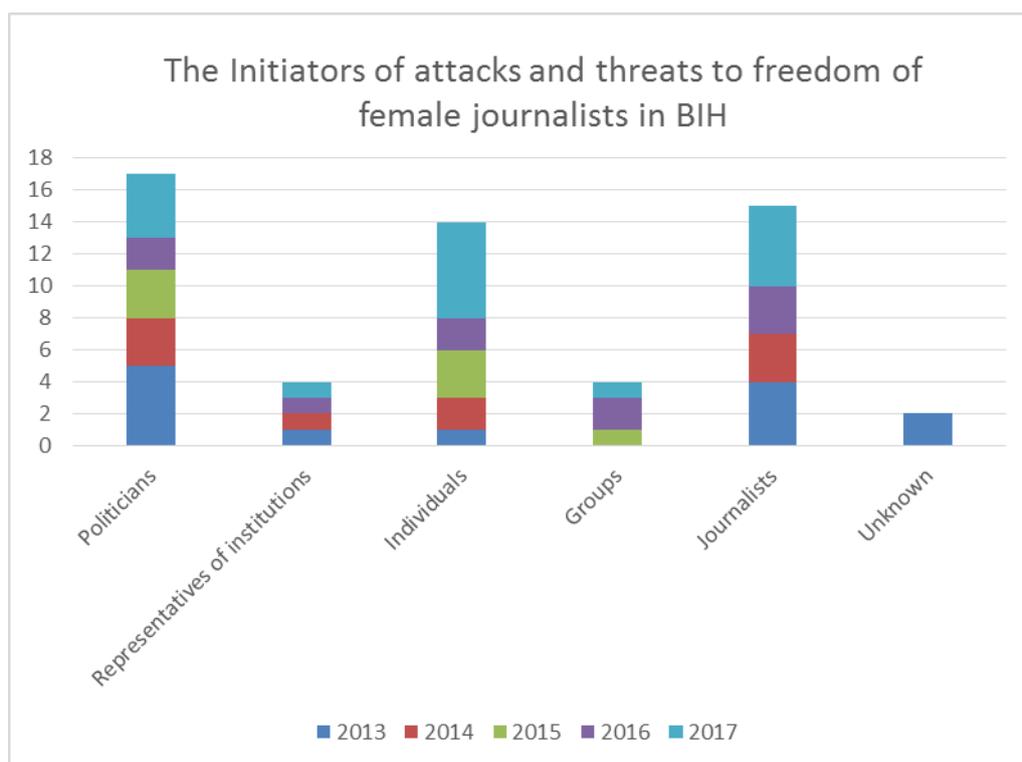
According to the Secretary General of the BH Journalists' Association, journalists are attacked by almost everyone: politicians and representatives of relevant institutions, media owners, religious dignitaries, and colleagues as well<sup>38</sup>. An overview of the initiators of attacks on female journalists (threats, verbal and physical attacks) as well as political and pressures at work in the period 2013-2017 is given in the following chart.

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<sup>36</sup> FMHL, 2016, case No. 14

<sup>37</sup> FMHL, 2017, Cases from previous period that are still active.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.bljesak.info/vijesti/flash/novinari-su-branitelji-ljudskih-prava-okoncati-nekaznjavanje-napada-na-njih/217546>



Graph. 4:

The initiators of attacks and threats to freedom of female journalists, based on data of Free Media Help Line (FMHL) of BIH Journalists' Association

As can be seen from the above chart, the main initiators of attacks and threats to the freedom of female journalists are politicians, then colleagues, indicating the spread of mobbing and censorship that female journalists face in the workplace and daily tasks, and then attacks by individuals.

When speaking about individuals as initiators, the cases of attacks and insults by well-known individuals who also have political connections were recorded. For example, the Director of the University Clinical Center in Sarajevo Sebija Izetbegovic at a press conference mocked the pronunciation (*ekavica*) of a female journalist of Al Jazeera Balkans Nataša Kovačev who posed the very legitimate question about the departure of doctors from Sarajevo's Clinical Center<sup>39</sup>. In an arrogant way through superficial and primitive insults it was tried to prevent the female journalist to do her job. It is particularly worrying that there were cases where individuals from the so-called socially prominent profession attacked female journalists. Thus, a lawyer from Dobož Sinisa Djordjevic verbally assaulted a journalist from ATV Božana Zivanovic, with a series of rude insults aimed at her private life<sup>40</sup>. The Management Board of the Association of BH Journalists in this regard issued a statement in which, inter alia, it is stated that: "It is devastating that inadequate qualifications, personal insults and

<sup>39</sup> FMHL, 2017, Case No. 6

<sup>40</sup> <http://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2013/12/03/javni-protest-sinii-oreviu-radi-verbalnog-napada-na-novinarku-boanu-ivanovi>

belittling the values of the journalistic profession are coming from a lawyer who should be familiar with the legal framework for the work of journalists in BiH and democratic standards of freedom of expression. Đorđević is also a high-ranking member of the leadership of the Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) in Doboje, which gives the whole affair a political dimension<sup>41</sup>.”

It is particularly worrying that the representatives of relevant institutions were directly or indirectly involved in these attacks. Indirectly, failing to prevent attacks and physical assaults- as was the case at the rally of the Ravna Gora Chetnik Movement near Visegrad. The police unit on that occasion not only failed to take adequate security measures because it was a set of high-risk, but it also did not protect journalists when they were physically attacked<sup>42</sup>. Directly, for example in cases of arrest, verbal threats by police and pressures from law enforcement officials... So in September 2017, a female journalist from Radio Free Europe - Liberty TV Marija Arnautovic and a cameraman from the same media outlet were prevented with threats of beatings by police to report about protests of demobilized soldiers organized in front of the Assembly of Federation of BiH<sup>43</sup>. A drastic example of the behavior of representatives of institutions is the case of a member of the Armed Forces Mirza Džidić from Zenica who publicly via FB called for the journalist Lejla Colak to be raped and personally promised to pay for that. Although it is a criminal offense of incitement (Article 30 of the Criminal Code), the sanction was reduced to a two-year suspension of career development.

### III Attacks on the Internet

Attacks on female journalists on the Internet are a special aspect of violation of media freedom and gender-based violence and harassment. The development of information technology has led to the creation of a new cyber space which enables the deconstruction of gender identities and stereotypes and creation of women e-topia<sup>44</sup>. In that sense the initiative *I was also in a situation of sexual violence* spread through social networks encompassing more than one million women speaking out through different and creative forms on social networks, which became sort of world campaign for the exposure of sexual offenders<sup>45</sup>. On the other hand, the Internet is increasingly becoming a place for various forms of media manipulation (i.e., fake news), pressures, verbal attacks and harassment including those based on gender. Some studies show

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> <http://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2016/03/14/osuda-napada-na-novinarske-ekipe-n1-i-ftv/>

<sup>43</sup> <http://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2017/09/23/protest-federalnoj-upravi-policije-zbog-prijetnji-novinarima-rse-tv-liberty/>

<sup>44</sup> Ivana Dračo, „Feministička pobuna na mreži“ u A. Zaharijević (prir.): Neko je rekao feminizam, Sarajevski otvoreni centar, Fondacija Heinrich Böll, Fondacija CURE, Sarajevo, 2012, pp. 302-332

<sup>45</sup> Lepa Mladenović, „#MeToo- Ženska solidarnost protiv seksualnog nasilja“, dostupno na: <http://zenskamreza.ba/metoo-zenska-solidarnost-protiv-seksualnog-nasilja/>

that 25% of attacks and harassment of female journalists happen on the Internet and have become for some female journalist part of everyday life<sup>46</sup>. As Dunja Mijatovic, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media emphasized "the usual targets of attacks on the internet are female journalists mainly reporting on crime, politics and sensitive issues in society," with the intention to disturb or prevent them from covering these topics and do their job. Thus, indirectly the female journalists should get a message, i.e., deal instead with more benign issues in accordance with traditional gender roles.

In the mentioned report by the Institution of the Ombudsman/men it is noticed inter alia that female journalists are more often exposed to online attacks than male journalists in order to prevent the publication of certain information or stories, with the intention of sexual or other harassment based on sex or even cyber bullying. In many cases of public attacks on female journalists over the Internet, what is noticeable is the absence of debate, denials, discussions about the information or opinions expressed online and the persecution of opponents.

A particular problem is that Facebook, Youtube, Twitter do not adequately promote gender equality and do not seriously engage through their platforms in order to detect the spread of violence against women<sup>47</sup> .... Although some mechanisms of protection are created and in cooperation with security agencies and organizations dealing with the protection of human rights, the online safety is established<sup>48</sup>, it is necessary to improve mechanisms for protection, to publish statistics on the cases of cyber violence, provide regular training for staff that is responsible for the moderation of cases concerning human rights etc. It is particularly important when it comes to gender aspects "to establish mechanisms for greater participation of women who have been exposed to violence on the internet, in order to provide useful information such as the reasons for their complaints and the impact that the offending content or violent behavior had on them"<sup>49</sup>. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the officials often ignore these cases because apparently there is no specific law<sup>50</sup>, but they can be subsumed under defamation, gender-based violence or threats which are treated in our criminal laws<sup>51</sup>.

The case of a threat received by a female journalist in 2017 through the social networks reading "you will answer before God, you devil woman"<sup>52</sup> proves the

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<sup>46</sup> <http://media.ba/bs/vijesti-i-dogadaji-vijesti/novinarke-izlozene-sve-ucestalijim-online-prijetnjama>

<sup>47</sup> Institucija ombudsmena/ombudsmana za ljudska prava Bosne i Hercegovine, Specijalni izvještaj o položaju i slučajevima prijetnji novinarima u Bosni i Hercegovini, Banja Luka, 2017, p. 59

<sup>48</sup> One World Platform, Association for Progressive Communications, Zaustaviti nasilje. Ženska prava i sigurnost na internetu, 2015, p. 29

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> FMHL, 2017, case 26

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 25

<sup>52</sup> FMHL, 2017, case 20

mentioned intersection of ethnic, religious and gender discrimination in the context of BiH society. The cases of calls for lynching, rape and the like, by sending messages via Messenger or Facebook pages and profiles have also been recorded. Female journalists who address important political issues or express their own views on sensitive topics (eg. in the case of presenting personal attitude about wearing hijab) often face the barrage of threats, incitement, hate speech calling for the commission of crimes against them, which is also a criminal act. Instead of debate, confrontation of opinions etc. it comes to a further radicalization and contamination of the public space by abuse of freedom of speech on the Internet<sup>53</sup>. The inaction from official institutions produces a constant fear among female journalists and according to the activists of one of the most drastic example is the case of journalist Lejla Colak who after many threats on the internet left Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>54</sup>.

Regarding the online media, a special problem of BIH society is that there is no central register of webportals, online media ownership is far more nontransparent and susceptible to political abuses<sup>55</sup>. Interviewed activists highlighted the problem that due to the lack of regulation of cyberspace and incompetency of institutions to deal with this, the Internet has become a new area for attacks on journalists and the media. As one activist noted:

"Although at first glance it looks like less dangerous, it is not true. When the attacks on female journalists are public, they can be controlled and publicly condemned because they are visible. The attacks on the Internet are mostly hidden and dangerous because the victim often does not know by whom they are being attacked, which increases their sense of insecurity and can produce serious trauma... "

## CONCLUDING OVERVIEW

Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded a downward trend in the freedom of the media in the last few years, which is, inter alia, measured by the number and extent of attacks on male and female journalists, including insults, threats and pressures. The institutions have as yet not created mechanisms to solve this problem, neither do they react appropriately to this issue, including the institutions that were established with the aim of promoting and ensuring the gender equality. They rarely condemn such cases and sometimes are either directly involved or are the generators of threats to media freedoms. A large number of pending and closed cases on judicial level also point at a climate of insecurity for journalists and their work. It is worrying that institutions do not keep records of assaults and other forms of endangering of journalists and their

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<sup>53</sup> <http://bhnovinari.ba/bs/2016/08/29/saopenje-povodom-prijetnji-silovanjem-novinarke-lejle-olak/>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.300.html:631743-Zbog-javnog-linca-bosanska-novinarke-napusta-zemlju-Zbogom-zohari-i-licemeri>

<sup>55</sup> Inicijativa za monitoring evropskih integracija Bosne i Hercegovine, Human Rights Paper, Paper 23, Alternativni izvještaj za BIH 2016, Sarajevo, p. 38

freedom, and the only reliable source is the Free Media Help Line run by the Association of BH journalists. Of big concern is that data and records kept by some institutions are not gender-disaggregated, although they are obliged to do so by the law, which disables systematic and deeper analysis.

Institutions are transferring responsibility one to another, and in the vicious circle of political influence on the media, non-transparent ownership, the crisis of traditional media, uncontrolled boom of online media and the lack of registers, financial insecurity etc. the journalistic profession is becoming more vulnerable, especially so as it is connected with the feminization of profession. Therefore, the question emerges about the number of unreported attacks due to fear of retaliation, which is perceived as higher of female journalists, reinforcing at the same time the patriarchal dichotomy of private-public. The mentioned Free Media Help line keeps records mostly on the basis of received complaints, which is an indicator that the attacks and other forms of violations of media freedom are more spread. Despite the mentioned feminization of journalistic profession, women are far less present in managerial position in media outlets, and therefore exposed to the pressures in media outlets and disempowered to report such cases. However, even in cases where female journalists hold managerial positions (mostly at radio stations), it is noted that there is an increase in the pressure, as in the reported cases by the female managers at local and cantonal radio stations of politically motivated pressures (in Gorazde, Zenica, Bihac, Kostajnica<sup>56</sup>,...). Unfortunately, there have been cases of bullying at work performed by female managers in media on journalists of both genders. Thus, some women in power reinforce the patriarchal values and induce the inequality. Therefore, the issue of reinforcement and empowerment of the female positions within media is additionally complicated, especially so since the social context is already disadvantageous for women and polluted by misogyny.

In a public sphere already divided along the lines of ethnicity, national entities and partocracy, the mentioned attacks and forms of bullying encompass within different dimensions and forms of discrimination based on the so-called forbidden characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, etc. Female journalists are often the victims of attacks because of the media organizations they work for, those attacks being 'spiced up' by gender allusions and sexism. This tactic is often used by politicians as a mask for the real motivation of their attacks, and also for the gaining of cheap popularity. Especially vulnerable are the female journalists who deal with 'sensitive' issues such as organized crime, corruption, shadowy political liaisons. Thus the public attention is by the trick of manipulation and crude sexism withdrawn from essential social and political issues.

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<sup>56</sup> FMHL, 2013, case. 15, 18, 30; FMHL, 2017, case. 59

Whereas it is true that female journalists are less threatened with physical violence than their male coworkers, on the other hand, there has been an increase in online threats and abusive language used by anonymous persons or organizations, which is equally traumatic. Another issue is unregulated status of the cyber space which in itself encourages threats and bullying, despite the fact that the BiH legal system does recognize inducement of a criminal act such as, call for public rape, for murder, or aggravating assaults, as crime. Social media networks have become a rich soil for the dissemination of misogynist and sexist language via FB profiles and as such are sanctioned adequately, but instead are only mildly reprimanded by various professional associations or individuals. It is symptomatic that civil associations for women often react on the spot only, by issuing a press release condemning these acts, but the fact is that the information in question does not reach wider public, since it is not further publicized, not even when women are in the positions of editorial managers and are free from the political influence.

In order to empower female professional positions in journalism and a democratic society, it is necessary to include a better strategy with a more substantial engagement of the official institutions in charge of gender equality. Especially important is the media sector and its capability in empowering the issue of gender equality. Since the freedom of media is a guarantee for all other forms of freedom, it is of a vital importance to ensure adequate cooperation and communication with the social and institutional network in order to promote the safety and rights of the BiH citizens.

The content of this text is the sole responsibility of author and BH Journalists Association and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union. 

## **Biography:**

Doc. dr. sc. Zlatiborka Popov- Momčinović is a professor of political sciences and head of the Department of Journalism and Political Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of East Sarajevo. The focus of her research is on gender, development of civil society and activism, religion and politics, professionalism of media and reconciliation processes. She is a member of scientific board for political sciences of BIH Academy of Arts and Sciences, and of the Appeal Commission of the Press Council of BIH.