

“LIGHT ‘EM UP OR SHUT ‘EM DOWN”

CASE STUDY OF THE
ATTACKS ON THE
NEWSPAPER NOVOSTI
WEEKLY AFTER THE
2024 CROATIAN
PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Attacks on the media in the Croatian public space have long been a common phenomenon, but after the 2024 parliamentary elections, it went a step further. The request to cancel public funding of the newspaper Novosti Weekly, published by the leading organisation of the Serbian national minority in Croatia, represents one of the most serious attacks on media freedom in recent Croatian history and a symbol of the anti-Serb hysteria led by the Homeland Movement (Domovinski pokret, DP), a far right party.

Among all vulnerable groups in Croatia, the Serbian national minority is the most frequent target of public chauvinistic outbursts, based on ethnic intolerance arising from the Croatian-Serbian war fought in the first half of the 1990s. The far right skilfully uses the relatively normalised and regularly publicly present hatred of Serbs to motivate voters and consequently achieve their political goals, which is why public attacks on the Novosti Weekly have been a frequent occurrence in recent years.

However, the fact that the issue of public funding of one specific media has been turned into a key topic of negotiations on forming a ruling coalition represents a distinct threat to the future development of the independent media sector in the Republic of Croatia, whose survival can only be guaranteed by the availability of adequate public funding. The far right is aware that the easiest way to silence critics is to accuse them of being “enemies of the people”, where it is logical to conclude that the Serbs are only the first on the “kill list”. If they succeed in depriving Novosti of budget funds, in the future, it will be much easier for them to apply the same tactics to other critical voices (e.g., those who find discrimination on gender, racial or religious grounds unacceptable or those who oppose disinformation narratives on climate change and other pressing social issues).

Croatian parliamentary elections were held in April 2024, just 53 days before the European Parliament elections. The pre-election campaign began with the President of the Republic, Zoran Milanović, declaring himself a candidate for Prime Minister in front of the left-wing coalition led by the

Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske, SDP). With this unprecedented act, the President “hacked” the election process and brought it to the very edge of constitutionality, prompting the Constitutional Court to react twice. These circumstances led to a campaign in which there were little discussions about the policies that the parties plan to implement, and the focus was mainly on fights, and often open insults, between the two main competitors for the position of future Prime Minister - the President of the Republic of Croatia, Zoran Milanović, and the Prime Minister, Andrej Plenković from Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ); while other political actors were unsuccessfully fighting for scraps of media and public attention.

During the campaign, the Homeland Movement advocated, among other things, for the deratification of the Istanbul Convention, the end of “gender ideology” and the stopping of the “invasion” of migrants. They stated that it was not acceptable for them to participate in sdssthe ruling coalition that would consist of the Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka, SDSS) and the We Can! – Political Platform (Možemo! politička platforma, Možemo)¹ and clearly wrote in its election programme that, given the chance, they will “audit the funds allocated to the Novosti Weekly” but few paid attention to their political proposals.

On that election on Wednesday 17 April, the Croatian Democratic Union and Andrej Plenković won another relative election victory. However, already on election night, it became clear that they would need another coalition partner to form a government in addition to the elected representatives of national minorities, which turned all eyes on the Homeland Movement, and thus their programme finally received significant media attention. During the negotiations on the composition of the parliamentary majority, the Homeland

¹ The We Can! – Political Platform is a centre-left party, and the Homeland Movement has repeatedly pointed out that their policies are in complete contradiction of their values.

Movement, in accordance with its pre-election promises, focused significant attention on the Novosti Weekly.

Six days after the election, **Ivan Penava**, the president of the Homeland Movement, at a press conference, in response to a question about possible cooperation with the SDSS, held a copy of Novosti in his hands and said:

“ What Serbs, which Serbs? Absolutely Serbian national minority, as long as they respect the Croatian state and laws, as long as they have no problem coming 5.8. celebrations and respect, if not celebrate the Storm, we have no problem. However, people like this man here... To support policies that fund creations like this, that have ‘hang FT’ headlines. That’s out of the question.”²

Three days later, **Mario Radić**, Deputy President of the Homeland Movement, when asked whether Novosti will continue to be financed from the budget, answers:

“ The newspaper of the Serbian national minority should exist and should deal with the cultural and life issues of the Serbian people in Croatia. But is this the narrative of these journalists writing there like that? They implement an agenda... [...] I think that whoever wants to impose these ideologies should go to the market. [...] These are mostly Feral journalists. I have nothing against it, but let them go on the market. What justice is it that Jutarnji is on the market, and Novosti is not.”³

On this trail, a number of other statements by representatives of the Homeland Movement followed, aiming to reassert several fundamental narratives about the role of the media in society and their financing, as well as to strength-

² Source: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/penava-na-kljucno-pitanje-o-sdss-u-nije-htio-odgovoriti-iza-toga-se-krijuskrivene-politicke-agende-15453256>

³ Source: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/radic-dp-sa-svima-cemo-pregovarati-ali-mislim-da-je-prvi-na-redu-sdp-milanova-ovic-u-kontaktu-we-are-with-him-15453217>

en nationalist sentiments in the public. Simultaneously, in the absence of concrete political initiatives to justify the decision to voters with regard to supporting the formation of a government with a party whose activities they had demonised until yesterday, for the Homeland Movement the issue of funding the Novosti Weekly represents an ideal topic. It gives them the opportunity to direct their provocative rhetoric against the Serbian national minority and critical journalists, while demonstrating to their voters that joining the coalition which will enable the continuity of the HDZ government, does not represent a betrayal of their own ideals and pre-election promises.

In this case study, we will present narratives⁴ about the media, and especially about the Novosti Weekly, which dominated Croatian public space in the post-election period. We will also touch on the narrative about national minorities, which in this case, will be intertwined with the issue of media freedom and public funding of the media. Please note that in this study, when we use the term “attack,” we refer to defamatory, offensive, and threatening messages directed at the media and journalists, calls for harassment and violence, unfounded accusations filed with relevant authorities, and dissemination of misinformation about various aspects of media work. Furthermore, not every quoted statement constitutes an attack, nor does it diminish the right of political and other actors to express their opinions and views. However, the quoted statements together form a narrative that serves as justification or an integral part of attacks on the media, specifically targeting the Novosti Weekly.

For the purposes of creating the case study, we used sources such as Faktograf’s archive and the Novosti archive, articles from other media, reports from the Croatian Journalists’ Association, official state documents, publications of the Serb National Council (Srpsko narodno vijeće,

⁴ In Faktograf, we define a narrative as a story that is placed in the public space with the purpose of imposing the desired interpretation of certain events, and which may or may not be factually accurate and grounded.

SNV) and materials provided to us by the Archive of Serbs in Croatia. We also conducted a semi-structured interview with representatives of the Novosti Weekly. The statements of politicians or other persons that we make in this case study were made publicly, through press conferences, in television shows, in the context of interviews with other media, or were published on their public profiles on social networks. Given that they expressed their views openly in public speeches, we did not consider it necessary to conduct additional interviews with these people. When creating this case study, we used the Guidelines for researching disinformation campaigns directed against the media⁵, which were developed within the project “Decoding the Disinformation Playbook 2”.

Additionally, we point out that, as stated in the Impressum of the Faktograf.hr portal, certain members of the Faktograf editorial staff have collaborated with numerous media in Croatia and the region during their journalistic careers, including the Novosti Weekly.

⁵ Further information: <https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IPI-Faktograf-Guide-to-Decoding-Disinformation.pdf>

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE ATTACK

Before presenting the post-election attacks on the Novosti Weekly, it is necessary to point out several key elements of the political and social context in which these attacks take place. Namely, Novosti is located at the intersection of two key discursive fields of the Croatian far right.

The first is the Croatian national myth, which is based on anti-Serbism and which does not allow any problematisation of the actions of the Croatian side during the Homeland War, and at the same time goes hand in hand with the minimisation or complete denial of Ustasha crimes against the Serbian population in Croatia during the Second World War. Croatian nationalism is also closely related to the majority affiliation of Croats to the Catholic Church, which is the main identity dividing line between the two peoples; Serbs are mostly Orthodox. Due to their linguistic kinship and decades of living in a common state, Serbs and Croats still largely share a cultural space today which is the fact that many on the right wing want to deny.

Another is the authoritarian understanding of media freedoms and civil society, where there is a strong belief that those media and civil society organisations that do not share far right nationalist dogmas are working against the Croatian state and are supported in this by domestic and foreign elites with the aim of subjugating the Croats and restoring Yugoslavia. This narrative, which is part of the ideological foundation of the Croatian far right, was described by the first Croatian president, Franjo Tuđman. The following is a quote from his speech in 1996 on the occasion of a mass protest against the then HDZ government due to the withdrawal of the concession from Zagreb's opposition Radio 101⁶:

“ And we will not allow the remnants of the Yugoslav communist system or the Yugoslav state as we found in Croatia with the establishment of Croatian free-

6 Further information: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/prije-26-godina-u-zagrebu-je-odrzan-najveci-prosvjed-ikad-da-sam-poslusao-tudmana-bilo-bi-mrtvih-i-wounded-1634748>

dom and democracy. We won't let it all put in question. We will not allow those Yugo-Communist remnants, but also those political dilettantes, headless trouble-makers, who do not see what is really about today in Croatia and in the world with any regional plans. We will not allow those who associate themselves with the black devil against Croatian freedom and Croatian independence. Not only with black but also green and yellow devils. We will not allow those who associate themselves with all opponents of Croatian independence. They don't just connect; they offer themselves to them. Not only are they offered to them, but they are sold to them for a pittance, as they themselves boast of receiving subsidies from all over the world. And they connect not only with fundamentalist extremists but also with some kind of false preachers, pseudo-democratic deceivers who preach big ideas to us today about human rights and freedom of the media. Yes, we created our Croatia for human rights and media freedom. But first of all for the human rights of the majority of the Croatian people. But, of course, with this Croatian freedom and democracy, we will also ensure the minority's human rights and media freedom. But we will not allow those from the side to solve or impose solutions on us. Croatia will not be anyone's colony. Croatia was often under the rule of the Venetians, Istanbul, Vienna, Pest and Belgrade. Croatia won its freedom, its independence, its right to decide its own destiny."

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Political representation of the Serbian national minority in Croatia

National minorities in the Republic of Croatia⁷ have the right to their political representatives in the Croatian Parliament. And while during the 1990s until the beginning of the 2000s, the method of electing these representatives changed, since 2003, a total of 22 national minorities elected 8 members of the Croatian Parliament in a special XII constituency. In that period, representatives of national minorities, as a rule, always supported the ruling majority, regardless of which side of the political spectrum that majority was on. This situation repeatedly caused controversy and, in 2018, associations close to the Catholic Church and far right political parties launched the civil initiative "The People Decides"⁸, which wanted to limit the right of representatives of national minorities to decide on the Government and the state budget. The Ministry of Administration determined at the time that a sufficient number of signatures had not been collected for the referendum to be held.⁹

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7 According to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, "The Republic of Croatia is established as a national state of the Croatian people and a state of national minorities: Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Bosniaks, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Russians, Bulgarians, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Turks, Vlachs, Albanians and others, who are its citizens, who are guaranteed equality with Croatian citizens and the exercise of national rights in accordance with the democratic norms of the UN and the countries of the free world", and the Constitutional Law on the rights of national minorities states that "a national minority is a group of Croatian citizens whose members are traditionally settled in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, and whose members have ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or religious characteristics different from other citizens and are guided by the desire to preserve these characteristics."

8 Further information: <https://faktograf.hr/2018/10/17/hoce-li-celni-ljudi-referendumskih-inicijativa-narod-odlucuje-i-istina-o-istanbulskoj-odgvarati-za-krivotvorenje-isprave/>

9 Further information: <https://faktograf.hr/2024/04/25/crodex-manipulativno-o-preporukama-venecijanske-komisije-i-referendumu-o-pravima-manjina/>

Of the eight representatives of national minorities, three of them represent the Serbian national minority, and members of the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS) were usually elected as representatives of the Serbian national minority to the Croatian Parliament. The President of SDSS is Milorad Pupovac, who has been continuously elected to the Croatian Parliament since 2003.¹⁰ Milorad Pupovac is a frequent target of attacks and the subject of systematic demonisation by various actors¹¹, mostly from far right political options, but in some cases the attacks also came from the left wing. Far right politicians and the media regularly claim that Pupovac is a “hater of everything Croatian” and baselessly accuse him of being involved in criminal acts and war crimes, and of working exclusively in the interests of Republic of Serbia¹². Milorad Pupovac was also attacked by both nominally left-wing presidents elected as candidates of the Social Democratic Party of Croatia, Ivo Josipović and Zoran Milanović, accusing him of being an “ethno-businessman” and of extracting money at the expense of the SDSS’s support for various governments, not for the Serbian national minority, but his clique¹³. In addition, the number of votes won by the SDSS in the elections, in relation to the total number of the Serbian national minority in Croatia, is emphasised in order to reduce their legitimacy, while the facts are presented outside the context of election rules.

These theses are equally promoted by the right wing, especially the far-right. In addition to this, individuals from the left wing believe that Milorad Pupovac’s claims in relation to

10 Source: <https://sabor.hr/hr/zastupnici/zastupnici-nacionalnih-manjina>

11 An interesting overview of the political position of Milorad Pupovac in Croatian politics is provided by Vlado Vurušić in a text from 2019: [PUPOVAC: A MAN WHOM CROATIANS LOVE TO HATE](#) Serbian nationalists called him [Tudman’s Serb](#), he is attacked by Croatian nationalists, not even the left spares him

12 Numerous examples of this rhetoric can be found in the [Bulletin of the Serbian National Council](#) which monitor hate speech and violence directed at members of the Serbian national minority.

13 More in Tomislav Klauški’s text: [Pupovac is the government and the opposition, a collaborator and a victim, but never a loser...](#)

him being an anti-fascist are hypocritical because he also supports right-wing governments. Although it is quite clear that the attacks have strong nationalist roots, political actors, including the Homeland Movement during and after these parliamentary elections, try to convince the public that they have nothing against the Serbian national minority, that is, those Serbs who “respect the Croatian state and laws” and “they have no problem coming on 5 August to at least respect the Storm with us, if not celebrate it”¹⁴. They claim that they cannot cooperate exclusively with Milorad Pupovec and the SDSS, which they accuse without any factual basis of carrying out Great Serbian politics.

All of this is relevant to the case study of the attack on Novosti because Milorad Pupovac is also the president of the Serb National Council, the publisher of Novosti. The Serb National Council (Srpsko narodno vijeće, SNV), as the national coordination of the council of the Serbian national minority, is an elected political, advisory and coordinating body that acts as the self-government of the Serbs in the Republic of Croatia. SNV deals with the protection and promotion of the human, civil and national rights of Serbs, as well as issues of their identity, participation and integration into Croatian society. It was founded during 1997 in Zagreb on the initiative of the Alliance of Serbian Organisations, and the founders were the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS), the Baranjski Democratic Forum, the Association of Refugees and Exiled Serbs, representatives of some ecclesiastical municipalities of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Serb parliamentarians and distinguished individuals.¹⁵

14 Source: <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/penava-tumacio-kakvi-srbi-su-mu-podnosljivi-pa-mahao-fotografijom-teslinog-spomenika-toliko-o-toj-mrznji-i-hordes-of-black-mustaches/>

15 Source: <https://snv.hr/o-vijecu/>

Novosti Weekly

The Serb National Council began publishing Novosti, with its full name the Independent Serbian Weekly Novosti, in 1999, and 25 years of continuous publication make it one of the longest-running political weeklies in Croatia. Novosti was initially distributed free of charge through the network of the Serb National Council and other organisations of Serbs in Croatia, and since 2009, Novosti can also be purchased at newsstands. The online edition, Portal Novosti, was launched in 2014, which enabled Novosti to expand its reach to other countries in the region. The Novosti Weekly is published in both Latin and Cyrillic script, and has a circulation of slightly less than 6,000 copies, of which about half is distributed through newsstands, and half is distributed free of charge through the network of the Council of the Serbian National Minority and other organisations of Serbs in Croatia. According to the SimilarWeb platform, the portal is visited by 350,000 readers per month. The Novosti Facebook page has more than 31,000 followers, and over 2,100 followers on Instagram. The magazine “Nada”, published by the Serbian Democratic Forum, and the insert “Privrednik”, published by the Serbian company Privrednik, are also published in the biweekly cadence. The aforementioned publishers receive financial resources for these editions through a public call from the Council for National Minorities.

As the Editor-in-Chief of Novosti, Andrea Radak points out that the editorial concept of Novosti has been stable since its inception, and the primary goal of the weekly is to inform members of the Serbian national minority, as well as other citizens, about the activities of the Serbian minority community in Croatia. Radak points out that the amount of content that Novosti publishes on the Serbian national minority exceeds the content in all other media combined by several times, which at the same time indicates that other media do not consider activities related to the Serbian national minority to be a relevant topic. At the same time, unlike some other minority newspapers, the editorial staff of Novosti considered from the beginning that reporting on the problems of the Serbian minority is not possible without contex-

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tualising the issue within the framework of the general political situation in the country, regionally and globally. Radak also points out that Novosti has always had a progressive orientation, nurtured relations with civil society organisations, and wrote about hate speech and discrimination.

“ Each step that made us more visible to the public was also a step that provoked a reaction from that same public which, in a way, it tried to return us to where some thought we belonged. Also, the general political situation affects how Novosti is perceived, that is, when there was a turn to the right, the reactions were always in the direction of shutting down or some patronising attitude of what we should do, what we shouldn’t do, and so on,” Radak points out.

Regarding the media’s independence from its publisher, Radak notes that the Newsroom Statute guarantees them editorial independence and that the newsroom itself chooses the Editor-in-Chief. Radak points out that they are aware of public perception due to the personal overlap of the SDSS and SNV leadership, and that this may be one of the reasons why they are the target of attacks, but that it is certainly not the only reason; she believes that due to their very existence in public space, they would definitely be exposed to the attacks.

Novosti Weekly and its journalists are winners of a number of professional journalistic awards. In the midst of negotiations on the composition of the new government and the fiercest attacks on Novosti, Novosti journalist Hrvoje Šimičević received awards from the Croatian Journalists’ Association (HND) for investigative and written journalism, and Novosti columnist Viktor Ivančić received a lifetime achievement award¹⁶. Previously, HND awards were also

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16 Viktor Ivančić was also the founder of Feral Tribune together with Boris Dežulović, who is also a columnist for Novosti. Among the former Feral Tribune journalists, Marinko Čulić, Igor Lasić, Ivica Đikić, and others worked for Novosti. More about the significance of the Feral Tribune and the parallels that the far right makes between

given to Portal Novosti Editor, Goran Borković, for written journalism (2021), Novosti columnist Marinko Čulić for lifetime achievement (2022), and Tamara Opačić for written journalism (2022). Novosti columnist Boris Dežulović is also the winner of numerous journalistic awards. In 2018, Novosti was also nominated for the international Freedom of Expression Awards. In 2023, they were awarded the regional “Srđan Aleksić” award, which is given for professional and socially responsible media reporting that results in tangible benefits for people and communities, as well as for demonstrating journalistic courage¹⁷.

The publisher SNV and the weekly, i.e. its journalists, as well as The Bulletin of the Serbian National Council, are facing numerous SLAPP lawsuits, and according to data collected for the purposes of HND’s survey on lawsuits against journalists and publishers, at the beginning of 2024, there were 12 pending lawsuits and 5 criminal proceedings, and 5 civil and 6 criminal proceedings were adjudicated, dismissed or suspended. Of all these proceedings, 6 criminal proceedings refer to the Bulletin of the Serbian National Council, and 22 to Novosti. Željka Markić is the prosecutor in 5 of them, and Robert Pauletić in 3.

The funding sources of Novosti are listed on their website, where it is stated that their work is supported by the Council for National Minorities, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and the American foundation National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The weekly also has the option of subscription and is sold at newsstands throughout the country.

17 Novosti and that paper is discussed later in the case study. Further information: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/portal-novosti-dobitnik-nagrade-srdan-aleksic>

Elements and narratives of previous attacks on Novosti Weekly

There is a long history of attacks on media freedoms and the spread of disinformation narratives in order to reduce public trust in investigative and critical journalism in Croatia. Starting with the already mentioned first Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and HDZ’s attacks on Feral Tribune¹⁸ and Radio 101¹⁹ during the 1990s, through more subtle ways of buying and capturing the media in the 2000s²⁰ and up to the ministry of Zlatko Hasanbegović for nine months in 2016 (then a member of the HDZ, and currently the President of a lesser-known party that runs for elections in a coalition with the Homeland Movement)²¹.

Attacks on Novosti, whether they come from politicians, political parties and initiatives, fringe media or citizens, are not new. In this case study, we do not have the ambition to show the entire historical overview of these attacks, because there have been countless of them in the past 15 years, but to show the key and illustrative situations and narratives that were recorded in the public and the media, which contributed to the fact that, in 2024, the fate of one media is negotiated during the formation of the Government. Also, when attacks on Novosti come from nationalist positions, they are often intertwined with attacks on Milorad Pupovac as a representative of their publisher and parliamentary representative of the SDSS, and in some situations it is impossible to separate whether it is an at-

18 Further information: <https://express.24sata.hr/life/gazili-ih-i-progonili-tu-man-zbog-njih-nije-mogao-spavati-16448>

19 Further information: <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/dilazite-fotke-iz-1996-ovo-je-bio-najveci-prosvjed-u-povijesti-hrvatske/2134142.aspx>

20 Further information: <https://faktograf.hr/2023/12/15/kako-je-hdz-zarobljavao-i-kupovao-medije/>

21 Faktograf has repeatedly written about Hasanbegović’s attacks on the media: <https://faktograf.hr/2016/03/10/mediji-opet-na-meti-ministra-kulture/>, <https://faktograf.hr/2016/06/24/javni-mediji-hrt-hasanbegovic/> and <https://faktograf.hr/2016/04/06/hasanbegovic-neprofitni-mediji-eu-fondovi/>

tack on Milorad Pupovac through which they then cross and Novosti or vice versa. However, through these attacks, some politicians clearly express their views on media freedom and journalism, and especially public funding of the media, which makes it clear that, although Novosti is being targeted due to the fact that it comes from the Serbian community, it is only part of a larger story.

As Andrea Radak said at a press conference in May this year: “Novosti, since 2009, since we’ve been on newsstands, there have been attempts to either light us up or shut us down”. In 2010, when Novosti published a front page with the headline “Demonstration exercise in Gajeva” with the addition “both, they both fell!”²². In question was a satirical piece that referred to a well-known motif from the wartime 1990s, for which the Croatian Helsinki Committee headed by Ivan Zvonimir Čičak sent a letter of protest to the Government and the Croatian Parliament, stating: “Respecting freedom of expression, the right of graphic and pictorial editing of newspapers, including Novosti, HHO protests because Novosti is financed from our pockets, and therefore the Government and the Croatian Parliament must be aware of the implications of such messages. It is also important that the national financing of that newspaper is a consequence of the coalition agreement with the Independent Democratic Serb Party”.²³ The attack is joined by the Ministry of Defence and the Croatian Army, i.e., Defence Minister **Branko Vukelić** and Chief of the General Staff of the Croatian Armed Forces **Josip Lucić**, who, as reported by Novosti, claimed in coordinated statements that the cover was an insult to all members of the Ministry of Defence, the

22 The front page referred to the fact that during an exercise of the Croatian Air Force and Air Defence in Slunj, during September 2010, two MIG-21 aircraft had an accident in the air at an altitude of about five thousand metres and both fell. The exclamation “both, both, they both fell” originates from the war operations of the Croatian Army during the Homeland War when Croatian forces allegedly shot down two enemy planes. Further information: <https://www.paluba.info/smf/index.php?topic=12237.0:wap2>

23 Source: <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/novosti-su-pad-migova-zabiljezele-na-dubiozan-nacin.html>

Armed Forces and Croatian war veterans. The President of the veterans’ association Hvidra, **Josip Đakić**, joined the raid and demanded the abolition of Novosti.²⁴

As a culmination of these attacks, around 50 people led by the **Autochthon Croatian Rights Party (Autohtona hrvatska stranka prava, A-HSP)** in front of the premises of the Serb National Council, i.e., the newsroom of the Novosti Weekly, set fire to two copies of the weekly. The president of A-HSP **Dražen Keleminec** pointed out that the Novosti Weekly insults the Homeland War, operation Storm, veterans and Croatia, and asserted: “They claim that it is freedom of speech, and we claim that it is hate speech”. In addition to the protest, the veterans’ association Independent Independent **Voluntary Soldiers of Croatia (Nezavisni Dragovoljci Hrvatske)** also organised the signing of a petition for the abolition of the Novosti newspaper.²⁵

Since the protest did not bear fruit, a new gathering was organised, which ended with the burning of the Yugoslav flag. **Dražen Keleminec** said: “We are protesting against the insulting of the Homeland War, because these people are creating a project for the reconstruction of the great Serbia, the reconstruction of Yugoslavia. We ask the government to stop financing Novosti with 12 million kuna and to ban that Serbian weekly.” Before the ritual burning of the flag, those gathered took an oath: “I swear by God almighty and everything holy that I will burn every copy of the Serbian weekly and defend the people from their lies.”²⁶

The President at the time, **Ivo Josipović**, said the following about the Novosti cover: “I don’t like it, it’s tasteless, and it’s up to the publisher to think about whether to continue such an editorial policy”, while **Zoran Milanović**, then still only

24 Source: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/hiljadu-novosti-najljepje-price-i-hajke>

25 Source: <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/u-znak-prosvjeda-palili-novosti-u-gajevoj-20101019/print>

26 Source: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/pravasi-zapalili-jugoslav-lensku-zastavu-ispred-redakcije-novosti-209861>

the leader of the opposition, said: “I’m not hurt, but I find it distasteful. I think it’s a clumsy, inconvenient and perhaps tasteless allusion that Novosti could have avoided.”²⁷

Novosti Weekly was attacked from the highest positions of political power in 2012, when it was attacked by the President of the Republic, **Ivo Josipović**, who on that occasion coined the term “**ethno-businessman**”, and which was later used by various actors, including the Homeland Movement, in their attacks on Milorad Pupovac. At that time, Josipović advocated the cancellation of funding for Novosti through the programme for national minorities²⁸, spoke of “better Serbs” and claimed that the elected SDSS parliamentarians were not real representatives of the Serbian national minority in Croatia²⁹. The Homeland Movement will later do the same thing, and Zoran Milanović will adopt identical “arguments” in his presidential term (while he was Prime Minister, and there was a constant conflict between him and Josipović, whereas Milanović had no such objections to Pupovac and the SDSS). Here we can point out that, at that time, one of the advisors of President Ivo Josipović was **Stephen Nikola Bartulica**, who is currently a representative of the Homeland Movement in the European Parliament and one of the initiators of attacks on the media, including Faktograf and Novosti, which will be discussed more later. Of course, in the background of this attack, as well as numerous other attacks, was the fact that Novosti Weekly was doing what it was supposed to do - exposing potential corruption and asking uncomfortable questions. In 2012, Novosti repeatedly wrote about the dealings of Josipović’s friend Marko Vojković and his company Emporion with the Croatian Society of Composers i.e. HDS ZAMP, an organisation responsible for the distribution of funds that musicians receive in the name of copyright, and of which

27 Source: <https://www.lupiga.com/vijesti/zasto-su-josipovic-i-milanovic-propusti-ustati-u-obranu-slobode-govora>

28 Further information: <https://www.lupiga.com/vijesti/osvetnik-s-pan-tovcaka-predsjednik-ivo-josipovic-u-javno-privatnom-dzihadu>

29 Further information: <https://lupiga.com/vijesti/viktor-ivancic-lap-sus-in-fabula>

Josipović was one of the leading figures. In a series of articles, Novosti questioned the earnings which originated from that business.³⁰

In 2015, the journalist and later Editor-in-Chief of Novosti, Nikola Bajto, wrote the satirical poem “**Lijepa naša haubico**” (a satirical version of the Croatian national anthem meaning “Our beautiful howitzer” in English) on the occasion of the military parade held in Zagreb to mark the 20th anniversary of the military police operation “Storm”, which was published on the Novosti portal, as well as on the last page of the weekly. This was followed by a new series of attacks on Novosti, in which they are accused of alleged insulting of the Croatian state. According to Novosti itself, the president of HVIDRA (Homeland war veteran’s association), **Josip Đakić**, demanded an end to budgetary funding of Novosti, the President of the fundamentalist Catholic association Vigilare Vice **John Batarelo**, claimed that the song was a “**pamphlet of hatred**”³¹, HDZ’s deputy speaker of the Parliament, **Gordan Jandroković**, said that it was “**spitting on to the Croatian national anthem**”, and the President of the Republic **Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović** in an open letter to the President of the Serb National Council, Milorad Pupovac, asserted that it is an “**offensive text**”, which is not satire and in which “**the Croatian national anthem is mocked.**” And while the President of HSP, **Daniel Srb**, and the Defence Agricultural Cooperative “**Domaćin**” (**Braniteljska poljoprivredna zadruga Domaćin**) filed criminal charges against the Novosti and its head people. Even individuals from the nominally left-wing political options did not miss the opportunity to speak out and share their views on the trail of right-wing narratives. SDP MP **Ingrid Antičević Marinović**, who will later become a judge of the Constitutional Court, commented: “**I don’t really see satire in that. The song mentions the line ‘while the Serbs are**

30 Further information: <https://www.lupiga.com/vijesti/ivica-djick-ivo-josipovic-pod-okriljem-moci>

31 Further information: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/vice-batarelo-zastupnice-pupovac-podrzavate-li-tekst-lijepa-nasa-haubico-1019928>

hiding their graves', and on the other hand, the Croats are portrayed as angry artillery. It is not satire, because it is not some people or some groups that are mocked or ridiculed, but everyone as a whole and to the detriment of others.”³²

Zoran Milanović, the then Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, answered the question of MP **Ivan Šimunović** from the far right party HSP AS about what he did to sanction the perpetrators from Novosti and to deprive them of the allocated funds: “I saw your question in the announcement, so I read that funny song published by Novosti. I don't like it, it's a form of pointless mockery. I'd cut my fingernails if the authors of that were Croats, I think I know which one. These are the guys who like to joke in an inappropriate way. And yes, it was financed by the Government and the former Government of the HDZ for 8 years, and it will not surprise you if I tell you that the target of these newspapers is usually or very often me personally and my party. What are you going to do? I'm not reading that.” He added that these are “tasteless jokes that will irritate a number of people in Croatia, but that is freedom and democracy.”

The **Croatian Journalists and Publicists (Hrvatski novinari i publicisti, HNIP)** association were also involved in spreading animosity towards the Novosti Weekly, whose president, **Katja Kušec**, asserted in a letter to the state attorney general that the song “presents Croats as militaristic criminals and murderers and thereby damages the reputation of the Republic of Croatia.” HNIP also organised a forum where it was stated that the song insults the Croatian people and the state.

Even the Council of Honour of the Croatian Journalists' Association³³ succumbed to the attacks and, after the Croatian Journalists' Association provided support to the

32 Source: <https://www.zadarnews.hr/ingrid-lijepa-nasa-haubico-nije-satiricna-pjesma-ne-smijem-se-na-stihove-dok-srbe-grobak-krije/>

33 Source: <https://www.novolist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/sto-nakon-hnd-ove-osude-satiricnog-priloga-bajto-sloboda-govora-ce-biti-pod-jos-vecim-pritiskom/>

Novosti newsroom, asserted that the publication of the satirical poem violated the Code of Honour of Croatian journalists and issued a warning to journalist Nikola Bajto and editor Ivica Đikić. In the end, the State Attorney rejected the criminal complaint against the Novosti Weekly, its editors, journalists and publisher and determined that “the disputed text represents a form of freedom of expression, guaranteed by Article 38 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, which guarantees freedom of thought and expression of thought. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account that the accepted standards of freedom of expression in a democratic society imply the presentation of those information and attitudes that are not generally accepted.”

During 2016, Novosti found itself under pressure and a series of attacks were carried out by the extreme right due to articles about Minister **Zlatko Hasanbegović**, for whom they found a photo from his youth wearing an Ustasha cap. On that occasion, **Ante Đapić**, the former leader of the far right **Croatian Rightists Party (Hrvatska stranka prava, HSP)**, demanded the cancellation of funding for Novosti, and the **Croatian Officers' Corps of the City of Split (Hrvatski časnički zbor Grada Splita)** requested an investigation against Novosti “for the criminal offence of spreading false and disturbing news” from the State Attorney's Office of the Republic of Croatia. They added that “Serbian Novosti is still fed by the SANU Memorandum which declares all Croatian troops from the 1990s to be Ustasha, so it is quite logical that for them that all Croats and those who destroyed their dreams of brotherhood and unity and Yugoslavia are Ustashas.” In the same year, Novosti also revealed the case of an Ustasha plaque placed in Jasenovac, the site of the death camp where the genocide of Croatian Serbs, Roma and Jews was committed during World War II, and which was also followed by attacks.³⁴

The publisher of the Narod.hr portal, the association **In the Name of the Family (U ime obitelji, UIO)** and its leader **Želj-**

34 Further information: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/hiljadu-novosti-najljepe-price-i-hajke>

ka Markić created an “analysis” of Novosti, which they sent to the then and current Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, and in the same year called on him to stop financing Novosti with Croatian taxpayers’ money, claiming that the government is “funding incitement to hatred and intolerance. In this case, according to the majority people, the Croats.”³⁵ At the same time, in her letter, Željka Markić managed to connect the fact that two young men of Serbian nationality started a fire in Dalmatia with the financing of Novosti, stating: “Spurred on by the news that five minors and an 18-year-old man, two of whom are citizens of the Republic of Serbia, have been arrested for starting fires near Kistanje - without going into the reasons why these young men decided to start a fire and endanger their own and other people’s lives, property and natural resources - I am free to once again point out to you the climate of intolerance towards the Croatian people and the state, which the Novosti Weekly is repeatedly spreading among citizens of Serbian nationality in Croatia, whose publisher is your coalition partner, Mr. Milorad Pupovac, and which this year was also allocated 3.2 million kuna from the budget of the Republic of Croatia.” **The publication Project Velebit** presents a video report about the fires under the title “Why is it burning only in the area where the weekly “Novosti” is distributed?” This statement is, of course, incorrect as the Novosti Weekly is distributed throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Croatia.

That’s why Novosti burned again in 2017, when a group of members of the far right A-HSP set it on fire in front of the headquarters of the Serb National Council and the editorial office of Novosti. Dražen Keleminec, the president of that party, burned copies of the paper, saying that Novosti, with its front page that reads “We light and burn”, called for arson in Croatia at the height of the tourist season, and that they had come to “oppose their Great Serbian policy in Croatia”, pointing out “we stopped them in 1991, we will

35 Source: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/zeljka-markic-andrej-plenkovic-novosti-drzavni-proracun-1190469>

stop them now too.”³⁶ After that event, as well as previous statements by Željka Markić, the Novosti newsroom received threats of violence and death, including those sent to them by Ivan Škrlec, the former secretary of the Zagreb branch of the far right **Croatian Pure Party of Rights (Hrvatska čista stranka prava, HČSP)**, who wrote the following to them: “Novosti, a trip to the sky... soon” and “Next time, we should organise an action and we should douse you with gasoline and set it on fire. For home - ready (Za dom spremni - an Ustasha greeting”.³⁷ It was only almost four years later, in 2021, that the State Attorney filed an indictment against Škrlec for the criminal offence of threat.

The Catholic portal Bitno.net notes that, in 2018, HDZ MP **Ivan Čelić** referred to Novosti during a parliamentary session. He wrote about this on his [Facebook profile](#): “I cannot and will not tolerate the funding of the Novosti Weekly from the state budget, which continuously insults the feelings of the faithful and calls out the Catholic Church for ‘bullying Croatia’.” That’s hate speech, that’s a line I won’t cross! And that’s why I asked him if it is democracy to call Cardinal Bozanić and other public figures a ‘family of lunatics’. In this way, Novosti only incites hatred against the Serbian national minority, and I don’t want that, and that’s why I had to react, even if inappropriately.”

Member of Parliament **Hrvoje Zekanović** attacked Novosti in 2019 for its cover, which showed the late President Franjo Tuđmana with a partisan head in his arms. Zekanović called it “hate speech” and called on Milorad Pupovac to explain himself. As Novosti explained, the cover was a reaction to the fact that the son of the HDZ MP and HVIDRA leader Josip Đakić posted a photo of a person on Facebook with the Ustasha insignia, and holding the severed head of a person with the Chetnik insignia in his hand. Novosti commented on this, stating: “For almost 30 years, HDZ has been

36 Source: <https://www.24sata.hr/news/zapalili-novosti-plenkovicu-porucili-da-ne-dira-plocu-hos-a-538344>

37 Source: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/prijetio-redakciji-novosti-pa-dobio-optuznicu>

persistently rehabilitating the NDH (Ustasha state during WWII, a.n.) and relativising Ustasha crimes, and then it was shocked when a young member posted a photo of an Ustaša with a severed Serbian head on Facebook.” This was answered by **Hrvatski tjednik**, which published a front page with the title “Creepy truth” and the text “Will Chief State Attorney Dražen Jelinić, after 30 years, call Pupovac to explain his role in the murder of Dr Ivan Šreter?” and illustrated everything with the figure of Milorad Pupovac holding a bloody knife and Šreter’s head in his hands.³⁸ Namely, the far right often accuse Pupovac of being connected to the never-solved case of the disappearance and probable murder of Croatian doctor Ivan Šreter during the 1991 war, although they offer no evidence for such a thesis.

In 2022, Novosti itself reported that in the Parliament, in the debate on the reports on the implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, the funding of Novosti from the state budget was again criticized. **Marijan Pavliček** from the **Croatian Sovereignists (Hrvatski suverenisti)** assessed that it was unacceptable, and **Miro Bulj** from the party Most (Most nezavisnih lista, Most), stated that a weekly newspaper that says Croatia is a “failed political project” should not be financed from the budget. Both are parliamentary representatives of parties from the far right political spectrum.

In the next year, in 2023, the parliamentarians continue in the same tone, and what Narod.hr conveys to its readers, not to condemn the attacks on the weekly, but contribute to the spread of the desired narrative. Thus, the representative of the Croatian sovereignists **Željko Sačić** said that Novosti spreads anti-Croatian propaganda. Most’s representative, **Nikola Grmoja**, pointed out that Novosti does not deal with issues that are in the interest of the Serbian national minority. **Ružica Vukovac**, representative of the Club for a Just Croatia called on the Minister of the Interior to initiate proceedings against the Editor-in-Chief

38 Further information: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/srpske-novosti-i-zadarski-hrvatski-tjednik-zaratile-naslovnica-1296039>

of Novosti, **Andrea Radak**, on the basis of the Law on Misdemeanours, for inciting intolerance, and pointed out that 600,000 euros were allocated to Novosti from the state budget. She emphasised that “it is not concerned with encouraging the cultural autonomy of the Serbian community in Croatia, but is encouraging intolerance towards the majority of Croatian people by grossly insulting them and Croatia itself.” The leader of the Croatian sovereignists, **Marijan Pavliček**, supported Vukovac’s thesis and pointed out that Novosti “spits on the foundations of the state.”

In 2023, the Homeland Movement MP **Daniel Spajić** also asked the Croatian Parliament to cancel the financing of Novosti because, in his opinion, they violate Croatian laws, and at the same time, he showed the cover that caught his eye and said: “Here I managed to find another interesting article from the Novosti Weekly so you tell me if this is not hatred, what is this? The man has his hand in his underwear, a checkerboard and an eagle are on top, and it says ‘Meloni e nostri Moroni’, which in translation means ‘Meloni and our morons’. I don’t know what it is if it is not an insult to the Croatian state.”³⁹

These attacks continue on the writing of **Hrvatski tjednik** at the end of April 2023 where, in one of the articles, it is written that Novosti is “bursting with intolerance and unrestrained hatred towards Croatia and the Croatian people” and that this “has grown into the now long-standing unbearable terror of Pupovac’s chauvinist and plutocratic gang over the whole of Croatia and the Croatian people, the terror of Greater Serbia and the Chetniks, while the anti-national **Plenković** and the left-wing **HDZ** provide them unlimited logistical support.” On the cover of that edition, the newsrooms of Novosti and Vida TV (another cultural and informative project of SNV which acts as a YouTube channel) are called “Chetnik nests”, which is why, among others, the Croatian Journalists’ Association and the Office of the Ombudswoman reacted.⁴⁰

39 Source: <https://faktograf.hr/2023/06/05/napad-zastupnika-na-novosti/>

40 Source: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/osude-hrvatski-tjed->

As a prelude to everything that will happen during the formation of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, in December 2023, **Slobodan Prosperov Novak** from the **Homeland Movement** announced on the Bujica show that if that party comes to power, it will cancel the financing of the *Novosti Weekly*.

In January 2024, the **Homeland Movement** published a press release signed by **Ivan Penava**⁴¹, on the occasion of, as they say, the appearance of Saša Kosanović, who they say is a *Novosti* journalist. Saša Kosanović also wrote for *Novosti* at one point during his career, but he had not been a journalist for that weekly for some time, which does not prevent the Homeland Movement from launching another attack:

“ [...] that it is normal for the Croatian Government to finance with tens of millions of euros through the so-called Milorad Pupovac of the Serb National Council and his ‘ethno-business’ clique, to finance the Serbian *Novosti Weekly*, which from issue to issue deals with undisguised, pathological hatred of Croatia, Croatian identity, great people and tradition. We have counted several dozens of front pages that deal with the founder of the modern Croatian state, the first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman, in a creepy, deeply disgusting way, which we will make public so that everyone knows exactly who and what HDZ president Andrej Plenković is financing. [...] I publicly call on the Government of the Republic of Croatia to immediately suspend the financing of the ‘ethno-businessman’ Milorad Pupovac, to immediately suspend the financing of the anti-Croatian pamphlet falsely presented as the Serbian *Novosti Weekly*, and for Andrej Plenković and Nina Obuljen Koržinek to immediately stop supporting the pathological anti-Croatian policy.”

41 [nik-napadi-srpska-manjina/32379037.html](https://stv.hr/clanak/novi-gnjusni-napad-na-dp-iz-redova-pupovcevih-novosti-pozivam-vladu-rh-da-odmah-obustavi-financiranje-tog-antihrvatskog-pamphleta/)
Source: [https://stv.hr/clanak/novi-gnjusni-napad-na-dp-iz-redova-pupovcevih-novosti-pozivam-vladu-rh-da-odmah-obustavi-financiranje-tog-antihrvatskog-pamphleta/ 5005](https://stv.hr/clanak/novi-gnjusni-napad-na-dp-iz-redova-pupovcevih-novosti-pozivam-vladu-rh-da-odmah-obustavi-financiranje-tog-antihrvatskog-pamphleta/)

PRESENTATION OF ATTACKS ON NOVOSTI WEEKLY DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE FORMATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA IN 2024

"LIGHT 'EM UP OR SHUT 'EM DOWN"
PRESENTATION OF ATTACKS ON NOVOSTI WEEKLY DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS ON
THE FORMATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA IN 2024

33

During the campaign, the **Homeland Movement** clearly expressed its views on Novosti, both through the pre-election programme and at pre-election rallies, as well as through communication channels on social networks. One of the videos they published as part of the campaign shows different Novosti covers with *a voice over*:

“ Up until now, Plenković’s HDZ has funded millions of anti-Croatian pamphlets that vulgarly and crudely insult the first Croatian president, Dr. Franjo Tuđman, with your votes. Funded with hundreds of millions of euros by the Serb Worlds of Milorad Pupovac’s SDSS and the occupying mayor of Vukovar, Vojislav Stanimirović. They gave state real estate to its main coalition partners and built 40 Serbian cultural centres. Is that your policy? No it’s not. Don’t let them fool you again. Don’t let your votes drive their politics. Plenković’s HDZ leads their policy with your votes. Your vote for the Homeland Movement is a vote for your politics. Yours, not theirs.”

In several posts on Facebook, they repeated similar theses about the financing of anti-Croatian media, and also regarding the poster (due to the content of which the HDZ reported them to the State Election Commission) they repeat:

“ With those for whom Vukovar was liberated on 18 November 1991, Plenković’s HDZ coalitions and finances with tens of millions of euros the SDSS party and their Serbian Novosti Weekly, which spreads national and religious hatred on the front pages and vulgarly insults the first Croatian president, Franjo Tuđman. Plenković’s HDZ is in coalition with the occupation mayor of Vukovar, Vojislav Stanimirović, and the president of the SDSS, Milorad Pupovec. What’s not true in that statement? The message of our poster is clear and undeniably true: - ‘FOR SOME, VUKOVAR FELL ON 18 NOVEMBER 1991, AND FOR SOME, IT WAS LIBERATED!’”⁴²

⁴² Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=739699268350653&id=100069317585367&set=a.146433137677272>

As before, during the negotiations on the formation of the Government in 2024, there were no twisted words and no need to read between the lines nor to spread disinformation and narratives through the fringe media, but the attacks took place completely openly, at press conferences or through interviews, in front of cameras and microphones. Mainstream media began to problematise the issue of cancelling funding for Novosti, and it became almost impossible for any representative of the parties of the future ruling coalition to appear in any media without answering the question of what will happen to Novosti in the event of a coalition between the Homeland Movement and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).

The day after the parliamentary elections, on 18 April, **Stephen Nikola Bartulica** made a guest appearance on N1 and declared:

“ It is enough to look at what Serbian Novosti wrote about me. These are things that do not deserve a review, let alone that taxpayers finance it. We will be resolute here. If the gentlemen want to continue to poison the political scene in Croatia in this way, let them go to the market and fight with the others, not that they are privileged because of three hands in the Parliament.”

Six days after the election, on 23 April, the president of the Homeland Movement, **Ivan Penava**, answered a question about cooperation with the SDSS at a press conference, holding the cover of Novosti in his hands and said:

“ What Serbs, which Serbs? Absolutely Serbian national minority, as long as they respect the Croatian state and laws, as long as they have no problem coming 5.8. and respect, if not celebrate the Storm, we have no problem. However, people like this man here... To support policies that fund creations like this, that have 'hang FT' headlines. That's out of the question.”⁴³

43 Source: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/penava-na-kljucno-pitanje-o-sdss-u-nije-htio-odgovoriti-iza-toga-se-kriju-skrivene-politicke-agende-15453256>

On 26 April, **Mario Radić**, vice president of the Homeland Movement, in an interview with Jutarnji list, answered the question whether Novosti will continue to be financed from the budget:

“ The newspaper of the Serbian national minority should exist and should deal with the cultural and life issues of the Serbian people in Croatia. But is this narrative of these journalists writing there like that? They implement an agenda... I really don't know what the implementation of some non-national ideologies has to do with a national minority. I think that whoever wants to impose these ideologies should go to the market. I have nothing against someone representing his views, everyone has the right to do so, but views that have nothing to do with the national minority issue cannot be represented using state money. These are mostly Feral journalists. I have nothing against it, but let them go on the market. What justice is it that Jutarnji (a Croatian daily newspaper, a.n.) is on the market, and Novosti is not.”

Stipo Mlinarić Čipe, the elected member of parliament of the Homeland Movement, told the media:

“ If I came before you now and said that I am for Rivers of Justice (left wing coalition, a.n.) and that I want it for sure, you would make a national hero out of me. If I told you now that I want to join the HDZ, they would make the biggest villain out of me. And I don't want to say either. I said it's not a problem for me. But to put in my mouth that I am in favour of the greatest persecution, to persecute someone - for that I am the last man in the world. But to finance Serbian Novosti, so tell me why none of the journalists ask why Hrvatski tjednik is not financed, which, by the way, I don't read.”⁴⁴

44 Source: <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/hrvatska/radic-dp-ne-moze-biti-dio-vecine-sa-sdss-om-i-mozemo--11506438>

The President of the Homeland Movement, **Ivan Penava**, announced on 8 May that an agreement had been reached on the formation of a parliamentary majority with the HDZ, where he pointed out:

“ So, issues perhaps less important for national politics, but for the Homeland Movement, and I see a large part of the public, a very important issue, is the financing of newspapers like Novosti. So, absolutely, we repeat, we have nothing against that, just like all of you, colleagues from Novosti, to do their work, go to the market, to be bought or not. But to pay for newspapers under the guise of minority newspapers, which, in fact, represent the agenda once implemented by Feral, that is, to attack the foundations of the state, to express political views, under the guise of protecting minorities, we are absolutely against that. So, dear gentlemen, we don't agree with you, I'm referring to the editorial staff of Novosti, and we don't have to agree, it's a democracy, you can write what you want, but not for our money. Welcome to the market, if Croatian citizens want to buy it, may God bless you with health, develop and grow, and that we will be someone who is in the minority and who does not understand this and that is okay. These are the only points that were important to us and points of recommendations in this sense that were discussed. I think we clearly understood each other. Finally, we follow our policies and we will insist on them. We do not have to, I will repeat, agree on everything, but we will definitely agree that what we have communicated in the past time, that the Homeland Movement cannot agree to actions that attack the Homeland War, Franjo Tuđman.”⁴⁵

Additionally, they clarified on Facebook what they had agreed on to create a parliamentary majority, but then sent a message to the public and to their new coalition partner, the HDZ, that “there remains a point on which we will insist, and

45 Source: <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/opinions/2024/5/11/kao-devedesetih-vlast-u-hrvatskoj-opet-protiv-srba-i-novinara>

that is the issue of financing newspapers such as Novosti, which use Croatian budget money to attack the foundations of the Republic of Croatia, and all under the guise of a press that should promote the values of national minorities.”⁴⁶

Stephen Nikola Bartulica, then an elected Member of Parliament, and today a member of the European Parliament, at the press conference on 9 May, in addition to attacking Novosti, uses the opportunity to mention Faktograf:

“ I'm not here like many on the left or Faktograf⁴⁷ who censors and decides what people will be allowed to read, far from it. Rather, the big problem, the fundamental problem, is that taxpayers have to finance something like that. [Novosti] serves to settle ac-

46 Source: https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=753850450268868&id=100069317585367&rdid=mMWkuKaj4tS6xkTC

47 Along with Novosti, Faktograf has also been the target of the Homeland Movement several times in previous years. Before the parliamentary elections, the Homeland Movement announced on its website: “This is fake news, and the statements of our leaders were maliciously taken out of context and could represent a template for the actions of the so-called fact checker. However, since these same factcheckers are heavily subsidised by the Ministry of Culture and Media, under the control of Plenković's author of the election programme, Nina Obuljen, it is completely clear that they will not react and that the spread of false news against the Homeland Movement is in the common interest of Plenković's HDZ and Milanović's SDP” by which they alluded to Faktograf's project of launching the Climate Portal. For the project “Facts about the climate crisis - klima.faktograf.hr”, Faktograf received grants from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan in a public tender together with 11 other projects of other non-governmental organisations, universities and media, and after the launch of the Climate Portal, it was exposed to organised disinformation to the campaign. Stephen Nikola Bartulica plays a particularly prominent role in the attacks on Faktograf, which we also wrote about in the case study of When disinformation campaigns fuel hate and harassment – Case study: Faktograf.hr. On the eve of the European elections, Bartulica repeatedly falsely attacked Faktograf's journalist Andrej Dimitrijević, accusing him of harassing and photographing his children. More in Sanje Despot's text: <https://faktograf.hr/2024/06/12/bartulica-je-dobio-izbore-izigravaju-ci-zrtvu-pa-to-radi-i-dalje/>

counts with ideological opponents. That is not the meaning of minority politics. Why should taxpayers finance a newspaper that settles with the Catholic Church and entrepreneurs who advocate for a market economy? [...] I'm not a big fan of the state financing a lot of things. I would prefer that readers and listeners determine what passes in the media space. In Croatia, unfortunately, we have this practice, so I would say it's abuse by those in power to influence in this way. [...] I am not a censor, I will repeat. Taxpayers are not obliged to finance it. I defend the interests of taxpayers. I'm not concerned with who will write what, I'm not a Faktograf."⁴⁸

Bartulica referred to Novosti during the second press conference he held on 15 May, saying:

“ I noticed that there is a moral panic rising there. There are no sacred cows in liberal democracy. No one is above criticism, not even Novosti, especially if they receive generous money from the budget. That time is over. What is being implied, that I or someone from DP would be responsible for some incident, is absurd. I saw a column saying that it would be useful to go back to where I came from. That's a call for lynching. Perhaps I will seek the protection of the American embassy in Zagreb if Croats from America are not welcome here. I will not give up on these changes, the Croatian public is asking us for it and we will deliver it. Everyone is welcome in the market competition, and if the gentlemen from Novosti are such good journalists, maybe tomorrow they will be the best-selling newspaper on the market. These things are worrying, these methods from the past to intimidate someone will not pass either - Croatia has gone through that and is a much healthier country for us to fall for it.”

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48 Source: <https://faktograf.hr/2024/05/09/zabranjivao-bi-knjige-i-medije-a-kmeci-zbog-cenzure/>

Some elected representatives from the list of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) joined the Homeland Movement rhetoric, so **Marijana Petir**, a former member of the European Parliament, and today an independent member of parliament in her second term, declared the following on N1 television on 9 May:

“ If we have a competition where it will be transparently announced what the state, because we are now talking about the state level, wants to finance and which values to promote, and which values cannot be violated, then those who pass the competition and win financial resources, they must keep those rules. Well, it is not investigative journalism that you are insulting the foundations of the Croatian state. [...] I addressed this to Prime Minister Plenković four years ago when I agreed to support him [...] Neither Novosti nor any journalist can devalue the Croatian state in which he lives, for which people died, who were left without a home, who were expelled, and whose fates are still unknown to this day. Having it on your cover and laughing like it's normal. This is not investigative journalism. It is an attack on human dignity [...] There are investigative journalists out there who do their job well. There are those who apparently have not yet come to terms with the fact that they live in the Croatian state and that it was created on the foundations of the Homeland War. The way in which certain media images are created that go through Novosti, but not only through Novosti, but also through some other media, I believe that they are not in accordance with the foundations of this country and the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. [...] This is not acceptable to me and it has nothing to do with national minorities.”⁴⁹

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Nino Raspudić, a former member of Most and now an independent MP, joined the narratives by saying the following on Croatian Radio Television (HRT) on 19 May:

49 Source: <https://n1info.hr/vijesti/je-li-dp-iznevjerio-birace-uvi-je-ostavljao-prostor-i-nije-iskljucivao-mogucnost-saradnje/>

“ It is somewhat morbid that the funds intended for the media of a minority are used so that someone has his own private political weekly publication. Pupovac made his private Feral out of these funds. We got an extreme left-wing political weekly that sets itself up as a club and calls out everyone under the guise of a Serbian minority weekly. These are public funds. Let them go to the market and let them sell.”⁵⁰

And while the mainstream media generally took a critical or at least neutral approach to this issue, part of the fringe media used the opportunity to add fuel to the fire.

A typical example is **Narod.hr**, which has been attacking Novosti for years with the same narratives, and therefore took advantage of this opportunity. During April and May, they published more than ten texts in which they pointed out the funding that Novosti receives through the Council for National Minorities from the state budget, incorrectly stating that “Instead of promoting the cultural identity of the Serbian minority, they foster intolerance towards the majority Croatian population.”⁵¹ They persistently reminded of their earlier work on Novosti, as well as the already mentioned [analysis of the work of Novosti](#), and criticised the support that Novosti receives from the Croatian Journalists’ Association, implying that this is so because some Novosti journalists participate in the work of the Journalists’ Council of Honour and the fact that a well-known journalist Slavica Lukić, who previously held the position of vice president of HND, is the wife of Milorad Pupovac. At the end of May, they also published a text about the Italian minority newspaper La Voce del Popolo, citing them as an example of what a newspaper of a national minority should look like, which, in their words, is:

50 Source: <https://teleskop.hr/hrvatska/nino-raspudic-pupovac-je-od-novosti-napravio-svoj-privatni-feral-a-sve-se-to-financira-s-600-tisuca-eura-from-budget/>

51 Source: <https://narod.hr/hrvatska/neraskidiva-veza-zasto-hnd-regira-na-svaku-kritiku-novosti>

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“ In addition to daily political topics, La voce deals with contents important for the entire Italian community. It devotes itself equally to the issues of all its members, starting with the youngest. Nurturing the Italian language, culture and tradition, they also work through cooperation with local communities in Istria and beyond.”⁵²

Velimir Bujanec and his **Bujica** have been a perennial ground for the media presence of the Homeland Movement and its political ideas in the public eye. The same was true during and after the election campaign. From the election to the formation of the Government, Bujanec hosted representatives of the Homeland Movement, such as Slobodan Prosperov Novak, Mario Radić, Stephen Nikola Bartulica and Ivo Čaleta-Cara. Along with them, he also hosted Nenad Vlahović, the former Vice-President of SNV, whom he introduces in the title of the show on YouTube with the words: “Serbian Nenad Vlahović: Serbs should celebrate the Storm! Pupovac was paying Peđa Grbin!” and calls him a “loyal Serb” who, from the position of his Serbian nationality, criticises Milorad Pupovac above all. In addition to the usual anti-Serb narratives and stories about state funding, Bujanec strongly insists on the alleged Yugoslavism of the weekly and its connection with the long-defunct Feral Tribune. He spreads the same narratives through [Facebook](#), where on 27 April, he published a clip from a press conference about the attack on Novosti, in which the reaction of Novosti journalist Hrvoje Šimičević to a question from a journalist from Z1 television was manipulatively edited:

“ HILARIOUS VIDEO FROM “H”ND: Watch how the character from Pupovac’s ‘Novosti’ yelled at the Z1 journalist! ŠIMIČEVIĆ (NOVOSTI): “The Homeland Movement wants to destroy the weekly I write for!”
PUPOVAC’S EMPLOYEE GOT ANGRY AFTER A QUESTION ABOUT HYPOCRISY AND CONFIRMED THAT HE REPORTED Z1 TELEVISION BECAUSE OF ‘ZDS’ ON THE AIR,

52 Source: <https://narod.hr/hrvatska/zasto-su-novosti-problem-ovako-izgleda-glasilo-talijanske-nacionalne-manjine>

WHICH LEADED TO THE BANNING OF THE BROADCAST...
IGOR PETROVIĆ: - Who decides who are “eligible” and who are “ineligible” journalists?
H. ŠIMIČEVIĆ: - This will be in Bujica?! You know it will be! Why are you lying?!

This post had 405 likes, over 100 mostly hateful comments and 26 shares.

It should be noted here that Z1 journalist **Igor Petrović** at the press conference only repeated the usual (and at the same time incorrect) information about the financing of Novosti, mixing the financing of Novosti with other projects and SNV programmes.

Bujanec reported on the entire press conference in his show from 29 April, which had 44,000 views on YouTube, and claimed that it was a “crazy, hysterical attack” by Šimičević on the Z1 journalist. Repeating the tendentially edited recordings, he again says that it is the editorial office of Feral that just moved to Novosti, calls them “Yugoslav scum” and says that people who are frustrated by the disappearance of Yugoslavia write in Novosti. In that show, he also gives space to the director **Jakov Sedlar**, known for his historical revisionism and denial of the genocide in Jasenovac, who calls Novosti “media bums” and repeats the narrative about the need for the state to stop funding Novosti, but that they should find themselves on the market, at the same time saying that no one cares about that anyway, nor does anyone read them. Additionally amounts to:

“ You know, they are against everything that has to do with Croatia, which has to do with Croatian sacrifice, with Croatian love for their homeland. [...] I completely agree that minorities must have rights and that is logical. Majority must protect minorities; always stronger seas protect weaker ones. [...] However, unfortunately, a large part of the Serbian minority throughout a large part of history, especially in more than the past hundred years, did everything to ensure that the Cro-

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atian state would never exist. And this is what distinguishes the Serbian minority from, say, the Jews. It is absolutely incomparable.”

Bujanec returns to HND’s and Šimičević’s media conference in the show from 3 May, which has more than 36,000 views on YouTube, when he emphasises an additional narrative, which is that there are also Croats who work against their own state and carry out Great Serbian politics (similar to what Zoran Milanović said when he was Prime Minister):

“ Croats and Serbs in Croatia are not quarrelling, nor Siniše, nor Branimiri, nor Velimiri, nor Ace, nor They, nor Them, but Hrvoji who are mercenaries of Novosti, who are not Serbs, who don’t care about Serbian culture, language, their plays, films and all that is good, that minorities must have, for folklore. Hrvoje who has nothing to do with Serbia, Hrvoje one and Hrvoje two, one is from Novosti, the other is from HND.”

And he additionally sends a message to Hrvoje Šimičević:

“ Here, Hrvoje Šimičević, that’s what the former vice president of Pupovac’ SNV told you (that the Bujica studio is not a septic tank and that he is very comfortable, note), the same SNV that you live off of. I want you to live, I want you to have, but I don’t want you to be lost and idle. Brother, put your crap on the market and if anyone wants to buy the version of Paloma (toilet paper a.n.) in the Novosti arrangement, if they want to wipe their butt, let them wipe with what you write.”

On 28 April, on a Facebook post, he draws a parallel between the current situation and Franjo Tuđman’s relationship with Feral Tribune:

“ PUPOVAC’S NOVOSTI: DP WANTS TO TAKE US BACK TO THE TIME OF TUĐMAN! I’m sure that the Homeland Movement will know how to thank them for the compliment... And introduce a tax on pulp - like Franjo introduced to Feral!

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The former ambassador of Mesić in Moscow, Božo Kovačević, wanted to attack the DP in Pupovac's Novosti, and actually gave them a compliment - declaring: "The Homeland Movement wants to return us to the time of Tuđman"...

GOOD MORNING, COLUMBO!

Sorry, Božo.

Novosti, which you gave an interview to, is not a typical "Serbian" newspaper, and at least it is a "minority" one. It is a typical Yugoslavian political scumbag, similar to the late Feral from Split - on whom Dr. Franjo Tuđman once introduced an appropriate tax and buried him - with the highest Croatian state "honours". A similar scenario is now feared by Pupovac's mercenaries, who just replaced one newsroom with another. I'm primarily referring to characters like Dežulović, Šimičević, Ličina and similar Yugans who have as much to do with traditional Serbia, the Orthodox faith and minority cultural heritage as Pupovac with Slava ceremonies!"

This status also went down well with Bujanec's followers, garnering more than 700 likes, more than 160 comments and 36 shares.

After the elections, the weekly *Hrvatski tjednik* publishes two covers on which it mentions Novosti.

In the first week of May, on 2 May, it publishes a front page with the following text: "Can Plenković survive without Pupovac, only with the Homeland Movement? It became unbearable to live with Pupovac's ruling Great Serbian policy. This is not only a question of Novosti, which implicitly calls for revenge and Croatian blood, but also of the Yugoslav paradigm that paralysed Croatia. If the HDZ - DP coalition happens without the SDSS, it will be difficult to survive in the long term due to the fact that the Homeland Movement and Andrej Plenković are in diametrically opposite positions of the moral-political spectrum." The Editor-in-Chief of *Hrvatski tjednik*, **Ivica Marijačić**, states again in his text that "Novosti implicitly advocates a knife, wire and bullet for Croats" and that they are a "schizophrenic Yugoslav

or Great Serbian newspaper." He also states that "it is not enough to stop funding Novosti" but that "Croatia will have to simply dislodge that nest of enemies and society from state-sponsored activism in general", justifying this by saying that "mature and stable democracies [...] would not allow them to operate at all."

A week later, on 9 May, *Hrvatski tjednik* publishes a front page with the text "The HDZ-DP coalition has not yet been agreed upon. Plenković does not give the Ministry of Culture to the Homeland Movement! Defending Nina Obuljen, he does not want to give up Milorad Pupovac. Two days after the election, he awarded 610,000 euros to Chetnik's Novosti. The consent of the Homeland Movement to a coalition without the Ministry of Culture would mean the political death of the party. If DP remains firm, new elections will be held." It should be said here that the Ministry of Culture and Media has nothing to do with the public call of the Council for National Minorities, where funds were allocated to Novosti. The article by Ivica Marijačić in the same issue deepens these theses. In addition to "journalistic" works, *Hrvatski tjednik* also publishes letters from readers that regularly contain hate speech towards the Serbian minority and journalists who do not agree with the nationalist dogmas of the far right.

Some other media also promote similar theses, so *7dnevno* on 2 May writes about Novosti as an ideological media, claiming that it is "financed from the state budget under the guise of a minority newspaper, and actually spreads some kind of Chetnik and anarcho-left ideology." The same theses about the "ideological media" are repeated in the issue of 24 May, after the new Government was voted in. The portals **Direktno.hr** and **Teleskop.hr** also regularly broadcast disinformation and defamatory statements of key actors regarding Novosti.

Journalist **Gordan Malić** also used the opportunity to attack Novosti via a [post on Facebook](#) on 26 April. He put forward a thesis about Yugoslavianism and traitorous Croats who write for Novosti: "at first glance, it can be seen that this is

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a radical communist paper with Yugoslav and anti-Croatian agenda financed by Croats by giving money from the budget to Serbs who then return it to Croat journalists, but only if they are sympathisers of the communist movement and the Yugoslav community of peoples. The Serbian national interest can thus be nicely hidden behind Croatian Yugoslavianism and Croatian journalists who would not survive a single afternoon on the market, among other things, because they despise capitalism and the market.” Malić dedicated another [post to Novosti on 27 April](#), writing: “That’s why I have a proposal, let HND take over the publication of Novosti. It is time that they pay for the politics of these newspapers, which they so friendly support, from their membership fees. Every member of HND should also be a subscriber to Novosti. Solidarity above all.”

The announcements were also transmitted in some fringe media, for example on [Max Portal](#) and [Direktno.hr](#).

The Association of **Croatian Journalists and Publicists (HNIP)** also came forward and attacked Croatian Journalists’ Association and Novosti again.⁵³

Social networks relied on these attacks, and in this particular case, they were not the ones through which the attack was organised in a coordinated manner, but represented only a tool for transmitting and amplifying the reach of clearly stated political messages. According to the Novosti newsroom, there were no organised activities of sending threats and hate speech, but individual messages that were mostly received via electronic mail. It can be seen that the threatening messages received by Novosti are entirely based on the statements of the Homeland Movement, as well as other actors of attacks on Novosti. We can illustrate this with two electronic messages:

53 Source: <https://www.dnevno.hr/vijesti/stali-na-stranu-domovinskog-pokreta-dilazite-kako-izgledaju-njihovi-tekstovi-i-naslovi-2415035/>

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“ You’re not so stupid that you don’t know that we’re going to take you out, fuck your Chetnik mother, who gave birth to you.

THE AVENGERS OF BLEIBURG, OF THE WAY OF THE CROSS, VUKOVAR, ŠKABRNJA, VOĆIN, LOVAS...

And with the most beautiful Croatian greeting:
FOR HOMELAND - READY”

“ In Croatia, the Chetnik projects Srpski svet and Sanu 2, which are led and propagated in Croatia by the Chetnik Duke MP, need to be destroyed as a matter of urgency!! Urgently close the Serbian cultural centers that spread and propagate the Chetnik project Serbian world and Sanu 2!! Urgently ban Chetnik newspapers Novosti that spread and propagate Chetnik projects Srpski svet and Sanu 2! !

Urgently ban the SDSS from being part of the Croatian government, never again and forever ban the Chetniks from leading Croatia! !

All those who love Serbia more than Croatia and live in Croatia, propagate the Chetnik projects Srpski svet and Sanu 2, and do everything against Croatia, from the Homeland War to the present day, should urgently be allowed to get back on the tractors and over Drina went to Serbia and never came back!!

It’s enough that the Chetniks are killing Croats and Croatia, and now they want to kill without weapons with the Chetnik Novosti and the Chetnik Srpski svet and Sanu 2!! Chetniks won’t be able to!! Enough of Chetnikism in the country of Croatia!! Get ready, get ready for tractors and cross the Drina again to Serbia!! Only loyal ones who don’t hate Croatia can stay in Croatia!!

C:ethnici Get out of Croatia !!

FOR HOMELAND -ALWAYS READY! ! GOD AND CROATS!!”

The Croatian Journalists’ Association has repeatedly stood behind the Novosti newsroom in recent years and strongly condemned the attacks, and they did the same twice during this post-election period. [At the press conference on 14 May](#), the president of the Croatian Journalists’ Association, [Hrvoje Zovko](#), emphasised that threats to Novosti journal-

ists are also threats to all other media and that “the Homeland Movement announced in its programme an attack on Croatian Radio and Television, on [state news agency] Hina, and that this should be carried out in effect, it would be the final blow to the already devastated media scene in the Republic of Croatia.” He also emphasised that HND “will oppose these announcements in all possible ways” and called on other newsrooms to show solidarity “because today it is Novosti, and tomorrow someone else.”

At the same press conference, Zovko pointed out that several “disgusting and heinous threats” were received against journalists from Novosti, and one of them was acted upon by the police. Until the conclusion of this study, the results of the investigation are not known, but according to the newsroom, the police took these threats seriously.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that the Croatian Democratic Union – although its members also have a history of attacks on Novosti – as a rule, behaved relatively cautiously towards the demands of the Homeland Movement.

“As for that paper, we have been witnessing for a long time that they are deviating from some criteria and standards related to the exclusive representation of the minority. The issue of financing Novosti is one of the issues that we will discuss in the coming period, and to be clear, they are not financed by the Government, nor by decisions of the Government,” **Tomo Medved** from HDZ pointed out.⁵⁴

“Novosti had its own specific performances, to which we from HVIDRA responded with a statement, and perhaps they should have been warned earlier that they cannot slander Croatian veterans and the state like that,” said HDZ MP **Josip Đakić**.⁵⁵

54 Source: <https://www.nacional.hr/pitajte-premijera-tomo-medved-ne-zna-ostaje-li-u-novoj-vladi/>

55 Source: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/milanovic-sazvao-prvu-sjednicu-sabora-sutra-prima-plenkovica-na-pantovcaku-dp-ce-jurcevica-izbaciti-iz-stranke-15458692>

During the presentation of the new Government, **Andrej Plenković** said: “According to the government’s programme, within two months we will once again adopt the operational programme related to the projects of national minorities. [...] When it comes to one weekly, we will certainly see through the Council for National Minorities what the criteria are and why out of all the national minority weeklies, this perceives as problematic when it comes to editorial policy.”⁵⁶ Thus, Prime Minister Plenković left room to fulfil the wishes of his new coalition partners, but also not to do so.

Five representatives of national minorities also voted for the new Croatian Government, along with representatives elected on the HDZ and Homeland Movement lists (with the exception of members of parliament Dražan Dizdar, who replaced Mislav Kolakušić, and Josip Jurčević⁵⁷). Out of Serbian MP’s, Milorad Pupovac abstained, while Anja Šimpraga and Dragana Jeckov did not vote.

In the end, it should be said that the Council for National Minorities, two days after the elections, on 19 April, adopted the Decision on the distribution of funds provided in the State Budget of the Republic of Croatia for the needs of national minorities in 2024, by which the Serb National Council for Novosti received support of €610,000. This means that intervention in the financing of Novosti in 2024 is not possible, but this only means that the newsroom will face a new round of attacks and attempts to starve them in the coming period, when the funds for 2025 will be decided. The programme of the Government of HDZ and DP nowhere mentions the question of financing Novosti,⁵⁸ and it remains to be seen whether HDZ will continue to resist the political demands of new partners or whether it will

56 Source: <https://n1info.hr/vijesti/plenkovica-u-saboru-pitali-o-financiranju-novosti-evo-sto-je-odgovorio/>

57 Mislav Kolakušić and his deputy Dražan Dizdar and Josip Jurčević were fundamentally opposed to the coalition of the Homeland Movement and the Croatian Democratic Union.

58 Further information: <https://faktograf.hr/2024/05/17/andrej-plenkovic-nadigrao-dp-program-vlade-skracena-je-verzija-programa-hdz-a/>

eventually pass through the adoption of the Operational Programmes of National Minorities for the period 2024 - 2028 and/or political pressures to the Council for National Minorities to cancel or reduce funding for News⁵⁹. On 13 June, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the Decision on the creation of operational programmes for national minorities for the period 2024 - 2028, and appointed minister Davor Božinović for its development.

After the government was formed, the focus was shifted from Novosti, and we note only a few statements from the Homeland Movement on the subject, for example **Igor Peternel's** statement at the press conference on 20 June, where he said that the Homeland Movement will not budge on the issue of financing Novosti.⁶⁰ It is to be expected that the Homeland Movement will continue to resort to anti-Serbian rhetoric, and therefore to attacks on Novosti every time they need to raise the national sentiments of their electorate and demonstrate that they have not “sold out” to the HDZ.

- 59 In doing so, one should bear in mind the long history of the Croatian Democratic Union's relationship with the media - from their capture to problematic legislative solutions.
- 60 Source: <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/dp-oce-kivano-nece-podrzati-pupovca-ali-ni-izvjesce-pravobraniteljice-za-ravnopravnost-spolova/>

NARRATIVES OF ATTACKS

In the case of attacks on Novosti that we record in this study, some of the claims of political actors are accurate in some aspects, but mostly manipulatively contextualised, contain some factual inaccuracies, and enter the realm of conspiracy theories. What is factually based is that Novosti was launched and operates as a newspaper of the Serbian national minority in Croatia, that it is financed by means of the state budget intended for the cultural autonomy of national minorities, that part of the journalists and external associates employed by Novosti previously worked in Feral Tribune, one of the most important Croatian media from the 1990s and the 2000s, and ultimately that Novosti is truly, among other things, engaged in investigative journalism, for which they have received numerous awards.

However, these facts, taken out of context, framed by inaccuracies, seasoned with nationalist rhetoric and conspiracy theories, and motivated by the desire to control the work of independent, investigative media, turn into a defamation and disinformation campaign.

In the attacks on Novosti, the basic thesis is that Novosti is financed with “taxpayers’ money” aimed at supporting the cultural and other development of national minorities, and they do not fulfil this task, but deal with “ideological topics and incite inter-ethnic hatred.” It is indisputable that Novosti receives significant financial income through a public call by the Council for National Minorities to achieve cultural autonomy in the fields of information, publishing, cultural amateurism and events, programmes resulting from bilateral agreements and contracts financed from the state budget. This public call is based on the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities from 2002, as well as on the operational programmes of national minorities. As stated on the website of the Council for National Minorities, the programmes of associations and institutions of national minorities “should contribute to the preservation of the ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity of national minorities, and at the same time contribute to the cultural, social and economic development of the Republic of Croatia. [...] The publication of daily, weekly and monthly news-

papers, leaflets, magazines, etc. is co-financed through information programmes.”

It should be noted here that associations and institutions themselves decide which programmes they will apply for and how much funding they will request for them, and only after that it is up to the Council for National Minorities to decide to support these programmes or not. In this sense, it is primarily the decision of the publisher of Novosti that, in addition to all other programmes implemented by SNV, it requests the most funds for the work of Novosti, which is also evident from the analysis of the funds allocated by the Council for National Minorities. Namely, the analysis of decisions on the allocation of funds from 2004 to 2024 shows that the share of funds for Novosti in the total amount of funds allocated to SNV increases in cases when the total amount of funds for national minority programmes is reduced, so in 2016, that share increases to almost 90%.

As for the thesis that HDZ and Andrej Plenković “buy” the support of representatives of national minorities through funds for associations and institutions, several facts are indisputable. After the initial increase in funds, from 2009 to 2014, funds for cultural autonomy were generally reduced, while from 2015 to 2019, they varied slightly. Only in 2020 will the total funds at the disposal of the Council for National Minorities reach the level of 2009. As of 2024, the amount of funds is €10,053,129, which is an increase of 75% compared to 2020. At the same time, neither SNV nor Novosti increase the funds they receive to that extent. In 2024, compared to 2020, the approved funds were increased by 28% to SNV, as well as to Novosti.⁶¹

Although it is clear that Novosti Weekly is very much concerned with issues of the position of the Serbian nation-

⁶¹ The funds allocated to the programs of the SNV generally follow the overall trend of either growth or decline in total funding for national minorities, with the exception of the year 2007 when the funds for the SNV's operations increased by 43% compared to the previous year, while total funds grew by only 18%.

al minority in Croatia, which is the subject of the call, the narrative according to which the newspaper issued by the representatives of a national minority can only deal with minority culture and identity, and has no right to comment and write about all other topics is extremely dangerous. At the press conference held on 14 May, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Novosti, Tihomir Ponoš, spoke about it:

““It is a very dangerous and insidious request that puts the national minority, that is, the newspaper of the national minority, and in fact all national minorities in perspective, into lower-ranking citizens, who, although they are citizens with all rights, should not be involved in internal politics, culture, health, social, education, foreign relations, international politics, everything that interests people. [...] It is not only an attempt at discrimination, but it is literally an attempt at a kind of segregation and pushing into a complete ghetto, if you will, both intellectually, indirectly and politically and culturally and any other.”

It is also obvious that the support programme for the cultural autonomy of national minorities foresees that the press that receives support does not have to deal exclusively with the culture and identity of the minority group, but also contributes to the development of the Republic of Croatia. Here we come to the question of how the Republic of Croatia should develop, for which far right political actors have their own clear vision, which is often incompatible with the fundamental principles of a democratic and pluralistic society based on human rights and media freedom.

Ultimately, we have identified several key narratives used in the attacks on Novosti, and we can divide them into three basic categories: nationalist, media and financial narratives.

These narratives are also used for other media, civil society organisations and minority social groups that are equally “unsuitable” to the far right; the rhetoric used often touches the sphere of conspiracy theories.

1. Nationalist narratives

- **The inviolability of national myths and identity foundations:** Questioning the Homeland War and the Catholic Church and its dogmas is declared an anti-Croatian activity, and those actors who question them are accused of implementing Great Serbian politics and Chetnikism, promoting Yugoslavianism and communism, and in a broader sense, are enemies of the Croatian people and the state. In this way, the concept of the other is created, which also serves the additional homogenisation of Croatian society by uniting around widespread nationalist myths and strengthening social control over individuals. Even when we talk about the media whose owners and journalists are Croats, if they question nationalist dogmas, they will be declared Serbs and/or Chetniks and/or their collaborators or agents.
- **The limits of the acceptability of minority activities:** The idea that the national majority is the one that should determine all aspects of state policies and whose grace ensures freedom for the minority is embedded in this narrative. The moment a minority begins to question the general state of affairs in a state that the national majority sees primarily as their property, the dynamics and power relations are disrupted, which is unacceptable to the far right and therefore they try to place minorities in their “ghetto” over and over again. At the same time, they try to shift the blame for their chauvinism to the very members of the minorities who “provoke” them, thereby actually harming all other “peaceful” and “loyal” members of that minority, disrupting reconciliation and coexistence, and inciting hatred towards the very minority they represent, in this case the Serbs. At the same time, when the state invests in Serbian cultural centres throughout Croatia, whose primary role is precisely minority culture and identity, then far right also declares this problematic and use it to fuel nationalist sentiments among their own voters, which only indicates that all these narra-

tives are completely false because the ultimate ideological goal is the complete invisibility of the Serbian community in Croatian society.

- **Conspiracy theories:** Claims that Novosti and other projects of the Serb National Council receive financial resources for the destabilisation of Croatia, which is associated with the Great Serbian ideology. In Croatia, all social actors who question nationalist myths are declared to be part of this alleged conspiracy, and it is claimed that there are foreign forces that want to destroy Croatia. In the case of Novosti, this narrative additionally contains the insinuation that Novosti is given financial resources in order for the HDZ to win the favour of representatives of the Serbian national minority in the Croatian Parliament and secure power in order to implement the policies of the “globalist elites.”

2. Media narratives

- **Hostile media:** Various political, civil and media actors publicly label as hostile any media that questions social dogmas or their political and ideological positions. This contributes to the amount of threats and hate speech that the medium encounters because the audience perceives the message as a call to action. Additionally, legal processes and SLAPP lawsuits are used to try to financially exhaust the media, and to encourage editors and journalists to self-censor. In addition to these lawsuits, they want to create the impression that the media is performing its work unprofessionally.
- **Media as enforcers of state policies:** The far right believes that the editorial policy of the media should be in line with state interests and that the media must respect precisely defined social values, i.e., nationalist myths and identity foundations. Certain actors do not see any obstacle at all for the state to determine the editorial policy of the media, which is also evident from

the programme of the Homeland Movement, which announced “the strengthening of awareness of the Croatian national identity in all elements of culture and the media, and the removal of interest groups that have been working for years to introduce globalist content in this issue.” Through state financing of the media in the scenario of the far right, critical voices are silenced.

- **Connection with Feral:** This narrative is very specific to Novosti, although it is part of a broader understanding of recent Croatian history. Namely, Feral Tribune was a Croatian political and satirical weekly published in Split from June 1993 to June 2008. With its uncompromising journalism and satire, it opposed the then Tuđman regime and exposed corruption scandals, war crimes and resisted the dominating and galloping nationalism and its dogmas. It was under constant attacks by the authorities and the ruling Croatian Democratic Union, and attempts were made to shut it down in various ways, through lawsuits and administrative terror. This connection compromises Novosti in the eyes of the far right, which continuously invokes Tuđman’s time as the one that is the foundation of the Croatian state and the so-called Tuđman’s values to which the state and society must return in order to achieve prosperity and sovereignty. Among the parties of the right, there is often a rhetorical competition as to who adheres more to Tuđman’s doctrines and who is the true representative of his politics. Feral Tribune, as the biggest critic of Tuđman’s policies, has always been a thorn in the side of the political right, and the mere fact that some former Feral journalists write for Novosti would be reason enough for them to discredit that weekly.

3. Financial narratives

- **The invisible hand of the market:** Includes the claim that the media should not depend on government funding, but should survive on the market. At the same time, for those who understand that in a democratic society

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it is difficult to ban the publication of a certain media through a political decision, the market is a tool that will solve that problem. The general situation in the Croatian media sector shows that the quality of content and market success are not connected; in fact, the habits of consumers of media content suggest that people prefer content that is entertaining, tabloid or controversial. From the financial reports of the leading Croatian media and other publicly available information about their financing, it is clear that almost the entire media scene in Croatia survives thanks to some form of state aid, whether it is tax breaks, public money intended for advertising or other forms of public funding.

- **State funding of the politically acceptable media:** This narrative is somewhat the opposite of the previous one, saying that the state has the right and should only fund the media when they respect nationalist myths and identity foundations. As it is explicitly stated in the Programme of the Homeland Movement: “The central cultural executive body, with its substantive decisions and financial instructions, will initiate identity issues on all levels of public life and will pay special attention to the introduction of neglected identity areas such as those media and associations that they get public money to demand stronger Croatianisation of content.” In other words, the media whose publications contribute to the popularisation of the ideological position of the far right have the right to expect state subsidies even if they are not able to survive on the market, and access to public funding should be taken away only from critical media voices.
- **Misuse of public money:** This narrative consists of continuous insinuations that Novosti abuses funds intended for the cultural development of national minorities, dealing with ideological topics instead of minority culture and identity, and that they receive these funds solely thanks to the fact that SDSS is a coalition partner of HDZ and that funds buy their support in the Croatian Parliament.

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Stipo Mlinarić Čipe summarised these narratives on his [Facebook profile](#):

“ Loving others does not mean hating and denying yourself. Loving Serbs in Croatia does not mean giving them money from the state budget in order to smear my people and the country in which we live together. Loving Serbs and giving them their rights is not the same as obeying the SDSS. Loving Croatia and its people does not mean, as many do and think, always and forever proving that love by working to our own detriment. Loving others and respecting them does not mean constantly fulfilling the tasks they give us, in order to prove that we are fair to them. Loving others, respecting others, does not mean loving yourself less, renouncing your rights, proving that you love them by stepping on yourself, denying yourself, and hating yourself. Loving the Serbs in Croatia does not mean doing everything Pupovac asks, nor does loving the Serbs mean financing hateful newspapers that constantly provoke and incite hatred, or agreeing to any kind of blackmail that any politician demands. The Homeland Movement does not agree to that! Rather, loving Serbs means being fair, thinking about their better life, their human rights, thinking that no one should oppress, persecute nor disenfranchise them. Rather, to love myself and do everything that is good and in the interest of my people, always and unconditionally, no matter how one understands and experiences it. This is the position and policy of the Homeland Movement, and it will be the policy of every government in which - if this happens - the Homeland Movement will participate.

KEY ACTORS IN THE ATTACK ON NOVOSTI WEEKLY

Homeland movement

The Homeland Movement is a political party founded in 2020, and its prominent members are partly former members of the Croatian Democratic Union, including the current president of the Homeland Movement and the mayor of Vukovar, Ivan Penava. Ideologically speaking, the Homeland Movement belongs to the far right, and their newly elected MEP Stephen Nikola Bartulica joined the club of European Conservatives and Reformists in the European Parliament. The party was partly created as a resistance to HDZ's move towards the political centre after the change of the party's leadership in 2016. The activities of the Homeland Movement were characterised by fierce criticism of HDZ, and especially by Andrej Plenković, on the points of ratification of the Istanbul Convention, management of the Covid-19 epidemic and cooperation with SDSS. The intolerance between these two political options went so far that the Homeland Movement filed a criminal complaint against Andrej Plenković before the parliamentary elections because of the influence that Plenković, due to his position, had on the election of the Attorney General and because he did not close the border crossed by illegal migrants. Before the election, Nacional published a video in which Andrej Plenković says: "That Penava exists, my late grandmother could be the mayor of Vukovar... everything that is done there, they did nothing themselves. Nothing. Zero. And took upon themselves the sacrifice of people who are not here anymore. And by the way, Marija wore a wire and that's why he is a president and a mayor now. They are bad people. Don't be fooled by them being right wing, they are our Croats. They demolished Kolinča, tomorrow they will demolish us. You must know that."⁶²

The pre-election programme of 2024 clearly outlined the political positions of the Homeland Movement, and the parts related to culture and the media are especially problematic. The chapter on culture in the programme of the

62 Source: <https://n1info.hr/vijesti/plenkovic-snimljen-kako-vrijeda-penavu-moja-pokojna-baba-bi-mogla-bitigradonacelnica-vukovara/>

Homeland Movement, entitled Culture - New Croatian Cultural Imaginary, is highlighted in a very important, second place, right after demography, while the chapter Media in the Republic of Croatia takes third place. Faktograf's Editor-in-Chief, Sanja Despot, analysed the pre-election programme of the Homeland Movement, so in her text ATTITUDES OF THE HOMELAND MOVEMENT: Protection of the culture of life and marriages, Croatianisation of education and the media... she lists a series of their pre-election promises announcing both attacks on Novosti and the severe situation for all independent and public media if the Homeland Movement gets the chance to influence media policy in the Republic of Croatia. Although it was speculated in the public that it would get the Minister of Culture and Media, this ultimately did not happen, and it remains to be seen what his real influence on media policies will be.

In its programme, among other things, the Homeland Movement states the following:

“ For the implementation of this programme, the newly formed government will immediately start working first on strengthening awareness of Croatian national identity in all elements of culture and media, and also on removing interest groups that have been working for years to introduce globalist content into this issue. The central cultural executive body, with its substantive decisions and financial instructions, will initiate identity issues on all levels of public life and will pay special attention to the introduction of neglected identity areas, such as demanding stronger Croatianisation of content from those media and associations that receive public money... this will be reformed in the management of the public television and radio service and the Croatian reporting news agency - HINA.”

They further state that “it is necessary to carry out a fundamental audit of the financing of those associations which are known to have directly engaged in anti-Croat activities, trying to diminish the institutions of Croatian culture as well as the awareness of Croatian identity.”

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They also announce the establishment of a commission that will “perform a Croatological analysis of textbooks and publications in the Republic of Serbia, as well as handbooks of the Serbian national minority in Croatia.”

A government commission will be established which will carry out an analysis, and then “propose measures to Croatianise the programmes of state television, as well as radio, and all their programmes”, and finally they state that “in cooperation with the Ministry of Science, the funds allocated to the Novosti Weekly will be audited, and for some other portals and newspapers, because of the obvious anti-Croatian activity they have been developing for years.”

The Homeland Movement is relatively active on social networks. It has 67,000 followers on Facebook, 16,500 on YouTube (which is, for example, four times more than HDZ), and 6,500 on Instagram.

Stephen Nikola Bartulica

Stephen Nikola Bartulica is an American citizen who moved to Croatia in the early 1990s to get a job in the civil service and start building his political career. The Homeland Movement previously introduced him to the Croatian Parliament, and in 2024, they also enabled him to become a member of the European Parliament. In the European Parliament, he joined the club of European Conservatives and Reformists. Since 2020, he has been a member of the Croatian Parliament, and before that he was a special adviser for religious issues to the former president of the Republic of Croatia, Ivo Josipović, who awarded him the Order of the Croatian Braider for this service. He was an adviser of the short-lived government of Tihomir Orešković, whose culture minister Zlatko Hasanbegović tried to prevent public financing of civil society organisations and non-profit media through a series of political decisions⁶³. Bartulica is also

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⁶³ At that time, Zlatko Hasanbegović was a member of the HDZ, while today he is a member of parliament and the president of the marginal far right political party Block for Croatia.

an associate professor at the Croatian Catholic University and president of the conservative association Centre for the Restoration of Culture (Centar za obnovu kulture). He has been a prominent face of numerous conservative initiatives in Croatia for the past ten years and is a member of the fundamentalist Catholic organisation Opus Dei.⁶⁴

Stephen Nikola Bartulica is relatively active on social networks. His Facebook page has just over 6,000 followers; 1,956 followers on his X (Twitter) profile; 1,403 on his Instagram page, and 140 subscribers to his YouTube channel.

In previous years, Stephen Nikola Bartulica also stood out with his attacks on Faktograf, and in February 2022, he spoke in the Croatian Parliament about Faktograf and alleged censorship on social networks, and announced the drafting of a bill to regulate it. Two years have passed since the aforementioned announcements, and the Homeland Movement has not submitted such a legal proposal to the legislative procedure.

His campaign for the European Parliament was followed by a series of scandals related to his assets card, in which he incompletely showed the assets he owns.⁶⁵

Ivan Penava

Ivan Penava has been the mayor of the city of Vukovar since 2014, a member of parliament since 2016, the president of the Homeland Movement since 2021 and a former member of the HDZ.

Penava left the HDZ after the defeat in the internal party elections in May 2020, saying that he chose fundamental values between those values and party discipline, explain-

64 Further information: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/tko-je-zapravo-bartulica-ultrakonzervativni-revolucionar-s-vrlo-intrigantnim-ulogama-tijekom-oluje-i-kod-ive-josipovica-15468865>

65 Further information: <https://faktograf.hr/2024/06/06/bartulica-bi-i-dzeparac-od-majke-trebao-unijeti-u-imovinsku-karticu/>

ing his reasons with the alleged non-prosecution of war crimes, the neglect of the economic development of Vukovar and the organisation of a population census in which “minorities enumerate minorities” which he called a trade between HDZ and coalition partners in which Vukovar was betrayed⁶⁶. Regarding the latter, it should be recalled that the right of the Serbian national minority to use their language and script in official communication and inscriptions in Cyrillic and Serbian in the City of Vukovar has been disputed for years, and Penava, as mayor, has continuously delayed the application of this right. In 2022, the Vukovar City Council passed a decision revoking the right of the Serbian national minority to officially use the Cyrillic alphabet based on the 2021 population census⁶⁷.

He is also remembered for the case when, in 2019, he published a video on the City’s website of Serbian students sitting during the performance of the Croatian national anthem at a football match. He removed the video only after the reaction of the Ombudswoman for Children. Then he concluded that “Vukovar is the epicentre of creeping Greater Serbian aggression” and identified the children in front of the journalists as students of Serbian nationality who are attending the Vukovar Technical School. Two days later, a Serbian student of that school was physically attacked.⁶⁸

Ivan Penava has 50,000 followers on Facebook and 570 on Instagram.

66 Source: <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/penava-napus-tio-hdz/>

67 Further information: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/cirilica-vukovar-problem-hrvatska-pupovac-18-16/27931962.html>, <https://portalnovosti.com/penava-opet-ne-dopusta-uvodjenje-bilingualism-in-vukovar> and <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/vukovarsko-gradsko-vijece-zakljucilo-da-srbi-nemaju-pravo-na-javnu-uporabu-cirilice/>

68 Source: <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/od-coveja-koji-je-obecavao-pomirbu-hrvata-i-srba-do-huskaca-tko-je-ivan-penava/2558703.aspx>

Mario Radić

Before entering politics in Miroslav Škoro's campaign for President of the Republic, Mario Radić was primarily involved in business and is one of the co-owners of Pevex, a well-known Croatian company. A detailed account of his role in Pevex was written by Petar Vidov in the text How the conflict in Pevex led to the “Mreža affair” and the dismissal of minister Davor Filipović. In addition, there is a story circulating in the public that Mario Radić is actually the real owner of the regional television stations Z1 and Television of Slavonija and Baranja, which broadcast “Bujica”, a show that openly promotes and supports the Homeland Movement and often hosts members of that party.⁶⁹

Mario Radić is currently the deputy president of the Homeland Movement and often appears in public, and he was also part of the negotiating team for forming a new government.

Although some media reports that Mario Radić previously had posts on Facebook, it is currently not possible to find his profiles on social networks.

Narod.hr

Narod.hr is a non-profit electronic publication that has been operating since 2014. The publisher of the Narod.hr portal is the association “In the name of the family”, whose leader is Željka Markić, a Catholic activist who became known to the public as the organiser of the referendum on marriage, which included in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia the provision that marriage is exclusively the union of a man and a woman, a participant and supporter. She was also involved in manifestations opposing the right to abortion, such as the “March for Life”, and she also put herself forward as a candidate in the 2015 Croatian Parlia-

69 Further information: <https://zagrebi.hr/lokalne-tv-izmedu-kontro-versnih-poduzetnika-i-serifa-1-drzi-li-osjecki-anonimac-z1-i-stv-za-marija-radica/>

ment elections as part of the “Homeland Project” political party, whose website states that the party was founded as a “political project of the association “In the name of the family” which, through its activities in civil society, recognised the need for a political platform that will ensure the supporters and sympathisers of the Association get their authentic representatives in state, regional and local government bodies.” Novosti and their journalist Hrvoje Šimičević wrote extensively about the activities of Željka Markić within the framework of various fundamentalist Christian initiatives and anti-gender movements.

Željka Markić is also, as we have already stated, a frequent prosecutor of Novosti, and at the beginning of 2024, 5 court cases were registered against Novosti and their publisher with her in the role of prosecutor.

According to data from the SimilarWeb platform, Narod.hr has 3.5 million visits per month and is among the 20 most read portals in Croatia. They have around 64,000 followers on social networks. Željka Markić also has her own podcast “55 minutes by Željka Markić” with more than 7,000 followers.

The articles of the Narod.hr portal have repeatedly been the subject of Faktograf’s verification of factual accuracy, and it has also been repeatedly determined that they spread misinformation or information that lacks context.

Narod.hr continuously accuses Novosti of “belittling the entire Croatian people”, “very rudely insulting the feelings of Catholics” and taking sentences published in Novosti out of context in various ways, while completely ignoring the satirical elements of the illustrations and columns.

Hrvatski tjednik

Hrvatski tjednik is the most extreme far right newspaper in Croatia, which has been using misinformation and hate speech for years to try to discredit perceived ideological opponents, i.e., all those for whom open fascist outbursts in public space are not acceptable. From 2002 to 2013, Hr-

vatski tjednik was published under the name Hrvatski list and was published by Dogma Press. Since 2013, it has been published under its current name, and first (until 2022) it is published by the company Tempus from Zadar, and then (from 2022) by the company Tempus 22. The owner, Director and Editor-in-Chief of Hrvatski tjednik is Ivica Marijačić. According to official data, total revenues for Tempus in 2021 amounted to €463,353.10, and €282,826.19 in 2022. Expenditures amounted to €370,126.75 in 2021 and €308,548.80 in 2022. The company Tempus ended the year 2022 with a loss of €24,445.68, while the previous year 2021 ended with a profit of €100,737.80. However, that is why the new company Tempus 22 did well and from 24/05/2022 to 31/12/2022, it generated revenues in the amount of €293,214.81 and a profit of €157,716.23.

As the Editor-in-Chief Ivica Marijačić claims, Hrvatski tjednik does not receive funds from the budget and is financed “exclusively from the sold copies of Hrvatski tjednik. We have great sales, Hrvatski tjednik is sold four times more than all other weeklies in Croatia combined. [...]Hrvatski tjednik has been sovereignly at the top in terms of copies sold for six or seven years, and especially recently, the next one behind us is four times weaker. Even some dailies sell more than they do in seven days.”⁷⁰ The Croatian weekly is exclusively distributed in printed form. According to the print market research conducted by the Agency for the Protection of Market Competition, the Croatian weekly was the third best-selling general information weekly in 2022 with an annual circulation of 200,000 to 300,000 copies⁷¹. Some retailers refuse to distribute it because of its extremist content; for example, Interspar stopped selling Hrvatski tjednik in its sales centres⁷². According to Novosti, as part of the final verdict against former Prime Minister Ivo San-

70 Source: <https://narod.hr/hrvatska/marijacic-za-narod-hr-hnd-se-identificira-s-novostima-hrvatski-tjednik-zivi-iskljucivo-od-prodaje>

71 Source: <https://www.aztn.hr/ea/wp-content/uploads//2023/07/Prikaz-stanja-trazista-tiska-2022-3.pdf>

72 Source: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/interspar-zabranio-prodaju-hrvatskog-tjednika>

ader for the Fimi media affair, it was established that HDZ used money from public companies around 2008 to take over Hrvatski list from its Editor-in-Chief Ivica Marijačić, for which he received 416,000 euros. Since the company that was supposed to be the new owner never took an 80 percent stake in Hrvatski list, which today is called Hrvatski tjednik, Marijačić kept both the money and ownership.

According to his own statements, Ivica Marijačić worked as a journalist for Hina, Vjesnik, Narodni list, Slobodna Dalmacija, was an Editor-in-Chief of Zadarski list, and started Hrvatski list in 2002. By the verdict of the Municipal Court in Zadar, Ivica Marijačić was found guilty of a criminal offence against marriage, family and children - violating the privacy of a child. Marijačić was sentenced to one year in prison with a probationary period of three years for publishing photographs of a minor victim of gang rape on the cover of his weekly in October 2019.

In October 2020, after Danijel Bezuk (22) shot at Banske Dvore with an automatic rifle, Prime Minister Andrej Plenković said: “Perhaps their inciting messages that they release to the public through various media and broadcasts, specifically I will name Bujica and Hrvatski tjednik as two glaring examples of the spread of hate speech, which are particularly directed at me personally all these years, encouraged this young man and the atmosphere with which he was infected to carry out such an attack, which in my opinion is an attempt at serious murder, with terrorist elements.”⁷³

Ivica Marijačić is a frequent guest on television shows and podcasts in which the far right is glorified, such as Bujica, Tihomir Dujmović’s Press Club or the Velebit Podcast, so in 2023, he was also a guest on Željka Markić’s podcast, where he commented on Novosti and Milorad Pupovac, repeating the thesis that “the greatest damage he [Milorad Pupovac] does is precisely the Serbian national minority. Billions of

73 Source: <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/moramo-stati-na-kraj-govoru-mrnje-i-radicalizacije-kojima-pridonose-i-huskacke-izjave-politinih-politika-aktera/30604>

kuna thrown to the wind. He provoked so much bad blood. Destroyed the opportunities for a possible reconciliation.” He told Narod.hr at the end of 2023: “These are people who are not able to earn a living and then, we can say, they fell on the Croatian budget and from there they promote foreign, anti-Croatian, hostile policies” and that “they do not have their own audience, their readers, they don’t work for anyone, they only work for some kind of policy that has been overrun as far as Croatia is concerned, but still exists in Serbia.”⁷⁴ At the same time, he accused the Croatian Journalist Association that “since he [Hrvoje Zovko] has been at the helm, that association has aligned itself with the Greater Serbian Novosti Weekly, one of the pro-Chetniks nests in Croatia that promotes Greater Serbian ideology and politics and the values of the state that has been run over in the 90s.”

At the beginning of 2024, and on the occasion of the Council for Electronic Media’s decision to punish the Bujica show, Hrvatski tjednik publishes a front page on 25 January with the text “How to put an end to Pupovac and his fascists in SNV and Novosti. They invented that the soccer fan’s conflict in Vukovar was an attack on Serbs, just like theirs in 1991. They invented that Croats killed 41 Serbian children. The Council for Electronic Media banned Bujica and acted as a Pupovac’s Novosti service and spat on Croatian veterans and the laws of the Republic of Croatia.” In the issue, he dedicates several inciting articles to Novosti, calling them “Chetniks” and repeating the usual anti-Serb narratives. This is happening at the same time that the Homeland Movement is issuing its previously mentioned press release on Novosti.

Ivica Marijačić sued the Bulletin of the Serbian National Council in 2017, claiming that Hrvatski tjednik was called an extremist in the Bulletin, which was reported by all the media and thus caused “devastating consequences”, because “out of 20 permanent or occasional advertisers” they were reduced to “2-3”, that he experienced the writing in

74 Source: <https://narod.hr/hrvatska/marijadic-za-narod-hr-hnd-se-identificira-s-novostima-hrvatski-tjednik-zivi-iskljucivo-od-prodaje>

the Bulletin as if Hrvatski tjednik was “put on the stake”, which is why he decided to file a lawsuit. At the same time, he told the court that “Marko Jurič, Marko Ljubić, Marko Skejo and Marko Perković Thompson had an agreement to sue together, but then it turned out that each of them filed a private lawsuit against the defendants. I must stress that I am a legal layman.” The Municipal Criminal Court in Zagreb decided that there was no defamation and insulting of the Editor-in-Chief of the Hrvatski tjednik.⁷⁵ A total of 6 lawsuits were filed on this occasion, 5 of them on the same day, which is a blatant example of a SLAPP lawsuit.

Hrvatski tjednik has been reported to the Journalists’ Council of Honour countless times, and Hrvoje Zovko, President of the Croatian Journalists’ Association, described the press like this in 2023: “Hrvatski tjednik is very clearly not journalism. It is the worst journalistic mud. [...] It is an inciting newspaper that spreads hatred from issue to issue, from year to year. Their writing in a normal democratic country should be dealt with by the bodies of publicly denounced persecution”⁷⁶. Novosti journalist, Hrvoje Šimičević, gave a detailed description of the work of Hrvatski tjednik in his text “Huškački tjednik”.

Bujica

The Bujica show, authored and edited by Velimir Bujanac, began broadcasting in 2008 on Osijek Television and was additionally broadcast on a total of six local television stations. In 2017, Bujica came under the production auspices of Zagreb’s Z1 Television and can currently be watched on the popular YouTube channel and on Z1 Television and Television of Slavonija and Baranja. Both television stations are sympathetic to the Homeland Movement, as is Velimir Bujanec himself, which

75 Source: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/marijadic-izgubio-u-sporu-zbog-biltena-snv-a>

76 An overview of just some of the scandalous covers of the Hrvatski tjednik can be viewed via the following link: <https://www.telegram.hr/fotogalerije/politika-kriminal/predsjednica-je-odabrala-hrvatski-tjednik-za-objavu-kandidature-evo-mali-reminder-of-some-of-their-earlier-works/>

is a turn from the open support of HDZ in the earlier period. In recent years, Bujica has very often hosted representatives of the Homeland Movement and gave them a platform to spread anti-Serb narratives and spread the thesis about the existence and implementation of Greater Serbian politics in Croatia, portraying the Homeland Movement as protectors of Croatian interests who will oppose it.⁷⁷ It should also be noted here that from 2017 to 2020, Z1 television was owned by Pe-
vex, in which Mario Radić is a co-owner, and then it was sold to Kodiak Trade. Unofficial information has been published in the media, according to which Radić is still the real owner of Z1 television, but there is no evidence to support this claim.

Bujica's channel on YouTube is followed by almost 80,000 people, and Velimir Bujanec has more than 130,000 followers on Facebook. He announced that he will soon launch a channel on TikTok as well.

A separate case study could be written about Velimir Bujanec and his media activities. Throughout his career, he worked in tabloids and publications of extreme far right organisations, and it is difficult to single out all the controversies associated with his name. As one illustrative example of his activities, which describes the tone of his shows well, we can single him out leading a protest in support of Z1 television, which was temporarily revoked of its concession in 2016 due to Marko Jurić's hate speech in the show "Markov trg". Namely, Jurić concluded his show with the words: "A message to the people of Zagreb, to all those walking around Flower Square, be careful, as there is a church nearby where, to paraphrase a Serbian minister, the Chetnik vicars dine. Watch out, when you walk through the Flower Square, especially mothers with children, lest one of those Chetnik vicars run out of the church and in his manner of slaughter perform his bloody celebration on our most beautiful square in Zagreb, which should perhaps be marked with signs, beware of a sharp Chetnik nearby." The protest was organised by associations of veterans and victims of the Homeland War, and the procession was led by veteran activist Đuro Glogoški, Velimir

77 Source: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/nek-ih-bujica-nosi>

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Bujanec and the Vice-President of the Parliament Ivan Tepeš (HSP AS) carrying a banner with the image of the President of the Council for Electronic Media Mirjana Rakić in the uniform of Croatian partisan fighters from the Second World War. At that protest, Velimir Bujanec presented Mirjana Rakić with a Chetnik hat and several "titovka" caps with a cockade and a five-pointed star, claiming that he got the cap with the cockade from a raped woman from Vukovar.⁷⁸

In 2018, the Council for Electronic Media detected hate speech in Bujica, so the six television stations that broadcast the controversial episode were temporarily left without a concession, for 24 hours that is, without the possibility of broadcasting the programme for 4 hours. It was about Zagreb's Z1 television, SBTV from Slavonski Brod, Osijek television, Srce TV, Adriatic TV and TV Jadran. Namely, in the show, in which Zoran Grgić and Frano Čirko were guests along with host Velimir Bujanec, a segment entitled "Confession of TL - Zagreb women, victims of migrant robbery" was broadcast, in which one of the interviewees said: "God forbid that someone beats or something. I mean... what I think should be done until exhaustion, until I guess they stop". A guest in the study on migrants expressed himself as a "sick group, infected with severe and transmissible infectious diseases (AIDS, hepatitis, tuberculosis)," which migrants intentionally spread. Velimir Bujanec assessed the statement as "a bit radical," but in the introduction of the show, he said that it was about "those savages who came from the East and who rape," thus encouraging the show's guests to a hateful, discriminatory and belittling discourse towards migrants, as pointed out by the Council for Electronic Media in its decision.⁷⁹

At the beginning of 2024, the Council for Electronic Media, based on an inquiry from Novosti, banned the broadcasting of the programme Z1 television and Television Slavonia i

78 Source: <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/onaj-danasnji-prosvjed-u-zagrebu-obljezila-i-jedna-bizarna-situacija-bujanec-je-mirjani-rakic-poklonio-cetnicku-kapu/>

79 Source: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/sest-televizija-privremeno-ostalo-bez-koncesije-zbog-bujice>

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Baranja for four hours due to the use of the Ustasha greeting “Za dom spremni (For Home - Ready)” in the Bujica show, i.e., the fact that on two occasions, the host of the show did not refrain from the greeting “Za dom spremni (For Home - Ready)”, but supported the statements of the viewers and encouraged the continuation of the controversial discourse with his comments.⁸⁰ Bujanec commented on this decision with the following words: “I will NEVER distance myself from the greeting under which my friends from HOS (controversial military forces a.n.) died - neither at the cost of dismissal, nor at the cost of my life! This is the least I can do for all those better than us, who died with this greeting on their lips, giving their young lives for the CROATIAN HOME and MOTHERLAND, where such things should not have happened.”⁸¹

The most recent bizarre performance directed by Bujanec took place on the night of the announcement of the results of the European Parliament elections, in which Stephen Nikola Bartulica was elected to the European Parliament with more than half of the preferential votes of the voters who voted for the Homeland Movement. Namely, in the days before the elections, the public followed the affair related to Bartulica’s property card and the purchase of a house in Prvić, and Bartulica tried in every way to repair the resulting damage, including a public address through a lawyer in which he asserted that his mother helped him financially when buying the property. In order to allegedly mock the media that exposed the scandals related to Bartulica’s property, on that euphoric night, Bujanec arranged for Bartulica to be driven to and from the election headquarters in an ostentatious luxury red Ferrari which, as it was later established, was driven by a man with a criminal record. This act by Bartulica, under public pressure, was later condemned by the entire top of the Homeland Movement.⁸²

80 Source: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/nakon-upozorenja-iz-novosti-sankcije-zbog-zds-a> and <https://www.novolist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/nove-kazne-zbog-bujice-i-greetings-for-home-ready-vigilare-association-registered-in-dorh/>

81 Source: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/w185HSkMEgNHL3fX/>

82 Source: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/krenuo-rat-u-domovinskom-pokrete-akciju-ferrari-pokrenuo-je-velimir-bujanec-1776617>

CONCLUSION

Across Europe and the world, we are witnessing the strengthening of far right parties that build political popularity and electoral results by labelling the media and members of vulnerable groups as enemies of the state and accusing them of participating in an alleged conspiracy of the global elite opposed to the people's interests. The specific case of the attack on the Novosti Weekly, in which one media outlet identifies with a particularly vulnerable ethnic group, provides a vivid illustration of the ultimate goals of such political rhetoric.

In this case study, we have shown how long-standing attacks on a particular media can reach their political crescendo in a situation where the far right comes to power. The abolition of funding for the Novosti Weekly, published by the leading organisation of the Serbian national minority in Croatia, the Serb National Council, was thus among the goals of an election programme and at the centre of political negotiations regarding the formation of a government between the centrist right Croatian Democratic Union and the far right Homeland Movement. All this happened in front of the public, at press conferences or through interviews, in front of cameras and microphones. Social networks were only a tool for transmitting and amplifying very clearly stated political messages, and all this erupted in hate speech and ultimately threats of violence and death addressed to the newsroom and journalists of the Novosti weekly.

Our analysis identifies three core groups of narratives used to attack Novosti, but they are not reserved only for this weekly. These are narratives that, with minor adjustments, have been used in Croatia for attacks on independent media, civil society organisations and minority groups for three decades.

We have divided the observed narratives, although they intertwine, into three basic categories: nationalist, media and financial narratives. Each of these narratives serves to promote fundamentally autocratic and nationalist ideas that aim to reduce media freedom, make minority groups invisible, and strengthen social control.

The attacks to which the Novosti weekly was exposed in the post-election period, which are basically aimed at shutting down its publication, apparently have yet to escalate. Although the Government of the Republic of Croatia did not commit to concrete steps in its programme, the Homeland Movement announced that it will fight for the abolition of Novosti as long as they are part of the ruling majority. It remains to be seen whether it will succeed in this. Certain other moves by the Government led by President Andrej Plenković related to media freedom, about which Faktograf wrote extensively⁸³, do not give a guarantee that in order to preserve the coalition majority, they will not give in to the pressures of the far right.

The rhetoric of HDZ leaders shows that they themselves tend to label the media as their enemies; Andrej Plenković himself, at a closed party meeting, the recording of which was obtained by the weekly Nacional, accused the media of tearing him down: “He [Zoran Milanović, op.a.] has a treatment as if he was a candidate for prime minister. Instead of everyone destroying him, he is isolated, so that no one comes to him. Do you understand? There is not enough culture in the Croatian political space. And this clique of leftist media, five key media that bring us down, but they don’t touch it or lift it up... It’s Nacional, it’s N1, it’s Index, it’s 24 sata and it’s Telegram. They’re all in groups, one writes an article and the same thing is on all five platforms in five minutes. In his last few press releases, trying to shift the burden on us, is it Ina, is it Škugor, is it this, is it that, copying the articles of Bero Jelinić and Jasmin Klarić...”

It was not the first time that Prime Minister Plenković looked at the media in this way and portrayed them as part of an alleged conspiracy against the HDZ.⁸⁴ Bearing this in mind,

83 Further information: <https://faktograf.hr/2023/07/21/kako-ministarstvo-kulture-i-medija-stiti-novinare/> , <https://faktograf.hr/2024/01/26/europsko-zakonodavstvo-kojim-ruling-the-argument-attempt-to-prevent-the-leak-of-information/>

84 Further information: <https://faktograf.hr/2023/02/07/plenkovic-se-od-optuzbi-za-korupciju-brani-teorijama-zavjere-pokus-avajuci-uredivati-medije/>

as well as the broader political programme of the Homeland Movement, which includes strengthening awareness of Croatian national identity in the media, a fundamental review of the financing of those associations and media engaged in anti-Croat activities, and measures to Croatise the programmes of state television, as well as radio, Novosti could be only the first media in a series that will suffer in the onslaught of the far right in Croatia. Additionally, putting the Croatian situation in the context of the elections for the European Parliament, where the far right achieved an increase in the number of representatives, as well as the strengthening of the far right in other EU countries (including the largest ones such as Germany and France), in addition to already existing European states in where the far right is in power (like Italy and Hungary), we see that the trends of attacks on media freedom transcend national borders. The narratives are the same everywhere, they differ only in rhetorical nuances.

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