

January 27, 2017

Dear Mr. Brkan and Ms. Cvjeticanin:

I am writing you concerning two stories that your organization "Istinomjer" which partners with Zasto Ne? ("Istrazivanje Istinomjera: Lazi placene novcem gradjana/ka RS [I i II]) published concerning the work of the RS Office for Cooperation, Trade and Investment in Washington, DC of which I am the Director. I have several concerns and grievances following the publication of these biased and deliberately misleading stories. I will list these concerns, but allow me first to explain why I am writing to you in English and not in Serbian. It is simply for the practical reason that I want your funders to be able to understand the problematic nature of your work and politically motivated "investigative journalism." I want the U.S. government, EU funds and governments, George Soros and your other foreign funders to understand that you are sincere in your desire to serve their political interests and that your zealotry in doing so has led to a noticeable lack of professionalism, fairness and transparency in your work. In fact, you are generating fake news that you claim to be combating.

Now allow me to list most of the problems with your reporting concerning these two published stories.

1. **Lack of Fairness:** No one from Istinomjer made any attempt to contact my colleague, Drina Vlastelic Rajic in order to check the information that was published in this story concerning the work of the RS Office in Washington, DC or me. Our response to the numerous accusations, innuendos and misrepresentations made in these stories was not sought. With respect to the parts of the story concerning our activities concerning the inauguration of President Trump there was a deliberate omission of facts and there was a total failure to verify facts concerning the inauguration with the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies.

You conveniently leave out important elements of the story surrounding your claims concerning the inauguration, while at the same time making unsubstantiated claims and outright lies. Here are just a few of these claims and facts:

- a. You mock and minimize the importance of the individuals and organizations that had invited President Dodik to various events surrounding the inauguration. For example, you mention former Congressman Bob McEwen in a condescending and biased way without explaining that he is currently the Executive Director of the Conservative and influential Council for National Policy. Even a precursory and brief Internet search would have shown the ties of this institution to the Trump campaign and to senior members of his administration. Congressman McEwen himself was an advisor to the Trump campaign

and is currently said to be up for an appointment by the Trump administration. You also fail to mention that many of your fellow “journalists” and activists of Bosniak NGOs publically vilified Bob and the other individuals and organizations who had issued invitations to President Dodik in an attempt to bully and intimidate them into recalling or rescinding their invitations. Some even called them to tell them they had invited an “evil” and “corrupt” man.

- b. You claim that PM Cvijanovic and Mrs. Dodik did not have formal invitations even though a copy of their invitations and tickets to the swearing-in ceremony were made available to the public. You intentionally did not publish these pictures because they clearly show an official invitation packet issued by the official Congressional Inauguration Committee. You also do not use the CNN picture used by other media in Bosnia –Herzegovina that clearly shows them before the beginning of the ceremony, in the seating section (Green - House of Representatives – Zone) reserved for official attendees, both domestic and international. Likewise, you misrepresent where they are sitting as being “a zone for visitors” and not for official guests. This is an easily documented lie as “visitors” would only be able to have access to the public standing room zones behind the areas reserved for guests with official tickets to the swearing in ceremony. The CNN picture and their tickets prove your statements to be false. The tickets with which we were provided came from a member of Congress and a former Chair of the Republican Party. We were also provided with tickets in the Yellow (Senate) sitting zone by a Senator.
- c. You imply that it was impossible for RS representatives to obtain tickets to the official inauguration ceremony even though you use a quote that I gave another journalist that talks about other international guests at the inauguration. Again you fail to do even a simple Google search to verify this statement, which is based on the fact that we had met members of the Albanian Parliament, the Columbian Senate, The Greek Defense Minister, and several other guests from Israel, Serbia and the UK. In fact here are a few stories about foreign dignitaries who received similar invites to the ones we received:  
<http://www.vox.com/world/2017/1/20/14335410/israeli-settler-leaders-attend-trump-inauguration>  
<http://www.balkanweb.com/site/zyrtare-ilir-meta-niset-neser-ne-uashington-i-ftuar-ne-ceremonine-e-inagurimit-te-donald-trump-si-president-i-shba/>
- d. You claim that I had lied about the RS attendance of the inauguration from beginning to end, but the evidence shows that everything that I had stated is based on fact and easily verified and proven by evidence that has been provided. There was a clear lack of willingness on your part to attempt to verify my statements both in your failure to elicit a response to your claims that I lied to the public and in your selective use of evidence. I have stated from the beginning that the invitation to President Dodik

came from people associated with the Trump campaign and with the new administration. I also stated that he had been invited to unofficial inaugural events organized by influential organizations and individuals close to either the Trump campaign, the transition team or to the new administration and I believe my statement is supported by the facts. Your claims are based on your opinion, innuendo and a selective misrepresentation of facts, unsubstantiated claims and outright lies.

- e. You mock my contact with Mr. Priebus and other members of the Trump administration and seem to think these contacts “bizarre” but fail to publish the other pictures that were published by RTRS from that private event that support my claims concerning the contact that we have made with the new U.S. administration. Of course the pictures only document one aspect of our efforts and contacts that we have established over the last several weeks leading up to the inauguration.

**2. Faulty, Slanted and Misleading Use of Statistics and Evidence:**

- a. You use selected statistics in order to make a cost/benefit analysis of the RS Office and our work that deliberately relies on faulty methodology in order to create a facade of serious analysis and to trigger an emotional revolt of your readers concerning “the waste” of RS funds. A fairer and more accurate cost/benefit analysis of our office and of our work would have been to use at least three different measurements/comparisons. One would have taken the reports of our activities that are public documents from which you did take the financial information you cite, and you would have listed what our office has done to benefit the RS. For example you would have listed the opening of the NCR Office in Banja Luka which has created over 140 jobs and which has seen an investment from this company in equipment and know-how that exceeds one million (U.S.) dollars. This has not only brought a major U.S. company to the RS but it also directly benefits Bosnia and Herzegovina as it opens a totally new economic sector for jobs and future investment. Hopefully this Center will grow and it will lead to additional jobs for the RS and for the Federation. Furthermore, the agreement with Johns Hopkins University Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery brought renowned surgeons and medical experts to Banja Luka. This increased the educational and practical knowledge of our own surgeons and helped improve the lives of two children and one young girl, who were given a new chance at a normal life. The value of this can be measured in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and has opened the door for several other children to travel to the U.S. for more complicated surgery, (except for the airfare costs which will be paid by the RS) U.S. based foundations will pay all other costs.

Our office has also promoted the work of artists, scholars and authors from the RS and from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Among others, we helped arrange the discussion and book promotion of Vladimir Pistalo at the Library of Congress. All of our activities in the field of art, film and culture are paid for from our modest budget.

If you want to fairly calculate the benefit of our work, this would be a better and more accurate starting point. I am very proud of our work and of our contribution to the RS and I am perfectly willing to provide an even more thorough accounting of the results of our work.

The second approach to fairly obtain a cost/benefit analysis of our Office and of our work would have been to compare it to the much larger and better-funded Embassy of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Washington, DC. A comparison can and should include examining the size of staff, cost and, of course, results. I will gladly participate in establishing which representation is most cost effective and beneficial to RS taxpayers.

Finally, another fairer approach would be to compare our office to similar representative offices in Washington, DC. For example those of international cities or of regions like Wales, Bavaria or even previous Balkan trade offices like those of Montenegro or Pristina (before they were recognized as states).

- b.** You also misrepresent the RS lobbying budget, lumping in all costs in the U.S. under lobbying, even when they have very little to do with lobbying in Washington, DC. For example, you list the firms that were/are advising the RS government on international law as lobby firms. These firms provide the legal backbone of every argument, decision and action made by RS institutions and elected officials that seek to right the wrongs and illegal actions made by the High Representatives and certain western embassies. We consistently are able to provide valid and compelling legal arguments to show that RS actions are in compliance with the Dayton Agreement and international law; while at the same time show the illegality and forceful imposition of changes to the Dayton Agreement that are not in line with international law. The legal case prepared with their help against Paddy Ashdown helped rescind the violation of human rights of dozens of Serbs and Croats who were illegally removed from office and deprived of their constitutional and civil rights without due process.
- c.** You selectively provide my professional background and work history. For example you mention Milan Panic and ICN, but fail to mention that my main role was to work with the opposition in Serbia in order to bring about political change during the undemocratic regime of Slobodan Milosevic. You also fail to mention that I was briefly the U.S. representative of the Alliance for Change, the precursor to DOS. I believe

you also avoided mentioning my work with IREX (1991-1997), where I also worked for the ProMedia Program, which at that time provided support for independent media in the Balkans. This experience is now the basis for my conclusion that you are deliberately manufacturing fake news in order to bring about political change that you desire.

**3. Opinionated and Activist Journalism with a (un)Clear Political Agenda:**

Your “investigative journalism” displayed in these articles is filled with opinions, derogatory and insulting words and phrases such as “lies,” “farce” and “trick the public” in order to cover-up the lack of evidence presented by your “journalist”/political activist. This is not only highly unprofessional but it also insults your readers because you show a lack of trust in their ability to reach the desired conclusions you are offering based on the slanted evidence that you present. I am not sure what your full political agenda is, but I am certain that it is driven by the interests of your funders and by your personal political beliefs that you have expressed publically on numerous occasions. It is clear that you are political actors that desire to influence political discourse and debate within the RS without the burden of accountability. You do not directly contest elections but your work and you are “weapons” used to influence their outcomes and when your preferred candidates fail, then you do everything you can to undermine the authority and legitimacy of those who won the elections and were given a mandate to govern by citizens using their democratic rights. Unfortunately, a similar situation exists in the U.S. It is even more unfortunate because any democratic society needs the media to serve as a “watchdog.” This role however must be earned and must be maintained with high journalistic and ethical standards, to which you have failed to abide in these two stories.

**4. Lack of Transparency:** For organizations that are supposed to serve as “watchdogs” for political parties, governments and political leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the basis of holding them accountable for good governance, transparency in decision-making and in spending public funds, you make it very difficult to find out what your budget is and who funds your activism. Unlike our Office, which spends its funds transparently and documents this expenditure both to the U.S. government and to the RS government as required by law, your organizations appear to be secretive and shy about this important information. When someone is attacked in the way we are attacked by your politically motivated journalism, it is important for your readers to understand who is paying you for this service on their behalf. Based on what I have been able to find out, it would seem to be driven by a combination of the U.S. Embassy, George Soros and several EU funds. All of which have also been very actively engaged in controversial political activism in other states (Albania, Macedonia and Serbia) in the region and all of which have a vested political interest in undermining the legitimacy and

credibility of elected governments, politicians and government institutions which do not comply with their wishes, blackmail or demands. In the case of the RS, it is clear that all of your funders have supported the illegal centralization of the joint state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and because of this have been in a political dispute with the President, Parliament and Government of the RS. This is a clear conflict of interest for your "NGOs." As you receive monies (without clearly identifying where they come from and who your donors are) often from parties actively engaged in disputes with the individuals and institutions you are supposedly keeping an eye on, all supposedly on behalf of the citizens of the RS and of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In closing I want to make note of the Code of Ethics to which you have committed yourself - in case it is not handy, you can access it here:

<http://www.poynter.org/fact-checkers-code-of-principles/>

It would seem to me that you have violated all of the first four principles listed on the Poynter checklist. I hope that you will not violate the fifth and last principle of correcting your mistakes in a transparent and honest way. A good starting point would be to print my response in its entirety so that your readers' can make-up their own mind about the quality of our work and of your reporting.

Sincerely,

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