

**Đurđica Klancir**  
**Editor and journalist**  
**Croatia**

### **Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your journalistic work?**

My name is Đurđica Klancir, I have been on the Croatian media scene for more than 30 years, I would say 35 years now.

As a political science student in Zagreb, in 1987 or 1988, I started writing for the student weekly paper 'Polet'.

I got my first job on the political weekly paper 'Danas', which was a very important and influential political weekly in Yugoslavia in the 1980s. That was right before the break-up of Yugoslavia.

In September 1989, I got my first permanent job at 'Danas', on the 'Life' section, about social phenomena. But I was always interested in politics and at 'Polet' I had already started gravitating towards political things.

After that, I wrote for 'Globus', 'Poslovni Tjednik', 'Poslovni Dnevnik', Business.hr, Tportal, Net.hr, EurActiv, Deutsche Welle, and now I am the editor for special content on the N1 television website.

### **Can you tell us when you first became aware that you were being followed and wiretapped?**

I was the editor-in-chief of 'Globus', one of the most widely circulated and influential weekly newspapers in Croatia at the time, with a circulation of over 100,000 copies. At that time, on the Committee for National Security, the head of President Franjo Tudjman's office, the then President Tudjman, [Hrvoje] Sarinic mentioned the monitoring and wiretapping of journalists. I interviewed Hrvoje Sarinic and asked him about that, of course. And at one point he said: "Want to see what it's all about?" That was a shocking moment. He showed documentation from which it was evident that an entire group of journalists from different media 'Feral Tribune', 'Nacional', 'Globus' was being followed and wiretapped, and that the Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order [national security service] was making notes or files about us at that time.

Of course, at that point I didn't know how widespread it was and what was actually being planned.

It is important to understand that at that time there was such a lot of tension between the authorities and the media and journalists who wrote critically about the authorities. We used to joke around occasionally – "Ah, they must be bugging us", or "Let's not say

it out loud, someone will record it". But I don't think we really believed that it was such a wide-ranging project.

As soon as we started writing about it, the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Ivan Penic, denied it, [saying] that there was no systematic monitoring of journalists and the media, but maybe – this is a justification that we often hear even today - someone else was being monitored, so something was recorded.

It was important for the representatives of the authorities at the time to deny that it was a case of systematic, deliberate monitoring and wiretapping of journalists and the entire media, mainly those who were critical of the authorities, ie. who questioned the decisions of President Tudjman and the ministries at the time.

Unfortunately, many of those services, the then secret police, were directly connected and linked with the top politicians and the president's office.

Of course, today we can all wonder how it is that the head of the office, Sarinic, received such documentation. I also wrote about it. The first documents I saw were unclassified.

Soon, some parts of that documentation circulated around the newsrooms, and some records about us. From the first documentation I saw, those notes about us, I saw that there were untruths and fabrications that were very unpleasant.

When the Racan-Budisa coalition won the elections [in 2000], the Ministry of Internal Affairs decided to open those files, to show journalists what had actually been done. Of course, it was another political gesture again, they wanted to show that they were different.

And I was invited to see those files, those materials. That was prepared, they put us in a special room and we were able to see what was colloquially called a file.

And that's where I was shocked because I wasn't followed only when I became the editor-in-chief of 'Globus', but much earlier, I would say as a young journalist.

I think the first note was from 1993, when I discovered, based on the documentation I received from the president's office, about how honours and the status of general were given to politicians and dignitaries who had not even seen the battlefield.

It was President Tudjman's decision. I think academician [Dalibor] Brozovic was there, I think Antun Vrdoljak was among the recipients of honours and general's rank.

So obviously it was concluded at the very top political level that I had to have a source in the president's office in order to get that documentation, and they wanted to find out how it happened.

I saw in my file that the order was signed by the then Minister of Internal Affairs Ivan Jarnjak.

When we translate this into real terms, it meant that in 1993, the Croatian secret police, at a time when they had much more serious work to do, wasted their time monitoring and wiretapping a young journalist.

I was renting [accommodation] then and I went to the newsroom by tram. To bring people a little closer to that time. And imagine now that one young journalist was followed and wiretapped in order to find out who my contacts were and how I got that documentation, which, of course, did not threaten Croatia's national security in any way, but it exposed the political standards of the then political leadership. The fact that the president of the state could make a list of basically his friends, by himself, in order to give them military titles.

**When you opened those files and got an insight into them, did you see the ways in which you were being monitored?**

In the 1990s, people who were assumed to be working for the secret services suddenly found their way into the newsrooms.

After the insight into the file in 2001, it was evident that what was being done was much more broad. That by all accounts, we were not only wiretapped, but also followed, and that this network of informants was probably much more complex than we assumed.

**Until 1997, you didn't know you were being wiretapped. When you found out, how did it affect your life and work?**

As a journalist, I had already experienced many attacks and unpleasant situations. I will remind you that in the mid-1990s, I wrote about [paramilitary leader, politician and war crimes convict] Tomislav Mercep and at that moment I was exposed to very serious attacks. From Mercep's circle, they used to come to my building and leave me messages on the answering machine.

So I already had experience with threats and it was completely clear to me that our job involves inconveniences and exposure that some other jobs do not. But when you see that somehow you are an enemy of the state and even the state apparatus...

Not only do they think they can do whatever they want to you, eavesdrop on you, follow you, enter your private space, but also extrapolate from it, draw conclusions, and leave a paper trail.

It was disturbing, and of course you wonder - yes, it will be documented one day, but who will read it?

What I think was extremely wise from the point of view of journalism and our profession is that I immediately went public with what I saw - to the media. Even then, I understood and it was completely clear to me that the best defence for us journalists is the public.

I think it was a good route, going public with everything. The public were made aware

and parliament discussed it again. It didn't blow over, it couldn't be hidden and kept quiet, regardless of the denials from minister Penic and many others.

Of course, they tried to play it all down, to say that we were accidentally caught up in some operation, that certain journalists' activities were recorded.

Later, from those files, not only mine, but also from those of other colleagues who were given access to theirs, it was clear that it had been going on for a long time, that the state's repressive apparatus was being used to investigate who journalists were contacting, particularly related to topics that were critical of Tudjman's government.

### **After you looked at your file, did you ever take any legal action against the state and those who wiretapped you?**

I spoke with the lawyer Slobodan Budak and I asked him if there was a basis for a lawsuit against the state, because it was really ugly and humiliating and malicious and absolutely against freedom of the media and journalism.

He said that, of course, there are grounds for a lawsuit, but it was like: "Djurdjica, it will take a lot of time..."

I thought about it, do I have the will and strength to go through all those presentations, all those discussions again, and somehow I decided after a few days: No, I won't, I'm going to move on, I'm going to move on...

It seemed to me that the reaction from the Croatian public was such that for all of us, and there were quite a few of us who were followed and wiretapped, it was enough satisfaction for us - that it was clearly understood that it was a great injustice, that it was unacceptable and that it was an example of the sort of authoritarian regimes that we wanted to leave in the past.

Of course, it should be noted that not everyone reacted that way. I remember some television show in which one of the interviewees, after I said everything that I consider problematic in that case, said:

"Well, as a serious and loyal citizen of the Republic of Croatia, it would not bother me at all to be wiretapped and followed, there is nothing to hide." I think it was Mr. [Miroslav] Rozic, I think he was in the Croatian Party of Rights at the time. And the show was 'Latinica'.

You will, of course, be shocked when you hear that someone thinks that this is normal and that if you are a good citizen, you have to put up with being checked up on a little to see if you are a good enough citizen.

At first it would seem that everyone will understand that this is unacceptable, however, no, not everyone did. It was publicly discussed: "Why is it being exaggerated?", "Well, the [secret] services are just doing their job... So if you are involved, if you have nothing to hide, if you have not done anything against Croatia, what is the problem?"

Here, in some of these cases, it was pure abuse. Apparently, someone from the president's office called minister Jarnjak and said: "Put the journalist under surveillance measures so we can see who delivered the documents to her from the president's office." That was really scary.

It was there in the file, I saw that they put me under surveillance measures, I think minister Penic was already there at that time, at the time when I was on maternity leave. So I wasn't even working as a journalist and I was put under surveillance measures.

So it's really crazy, you couldn't believe something like that could happen, but it did. The 1990s, that combination, that coupling of politics and the intelligence system. Remember that the son of President Tudjman was literally one of the key people in the intelligence system.

That repressive apparatus was seen as an instrument for preserving power. For keeping the Croatian Democratic Union [party] and the regime built by Tudjman in power. Of course, the new government then used it in some way for promotional purposes: "Here's what was done during Tudjman's regime - we will be better." We hope they were better.

Interview by Vuk Tesija, 2023

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