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Bosnians say IWPR/RFE programme is helping them to come to terms with the conflict. Facing Justice, a radio programme IWPR produces jointly with Radio Free Europe, RFE, has received very positive reviews from listeners in Bosnia.

Launched in November, Facing Justice is aired by 40 radio stations in the region. The half hour show will bolster IWPR efforts to expand public access to regular, reliable and objective information on the war crimes justice process in former Yugoslavia - essential for long-term democratisation and reconciliation.

The new project will build on our current editorial outreach activities whose focus up until now has been mainly on republication in the local print and online media.

At the beginning of February, we conducted a poll among radio editors, human rights activists and ordinary people throughout the country to survey their attitudes towards the programme.

The poll provided IWPR with a good overview of what Facing Justice has achieved so far and highlighted its importance for people in the region.

Milorad Milojevic, editor-in-chief of Radio Balkan from Banja Luka, Republika Srpska, said, "The best [thing about] Facing Justice is the analytical reports it provides, which help us understand the circumstances under which horrible things had happened during the wars in the former Yugoslavia.

"With mere court reporting, many things remain hidden and unsaid - the real picture can be obtained only through such impartial analysis.

"This programme [can] show that the Hague tribunal was absolutely necessary, not just for the prosecution and conviction of war crimes suspects, but also for confronting people with the truth and helping them leave war ideologies behind."

Munevera Basic, editor-in-chief of the Independent Radio Studio 99 from Sarajevo, said rebroadcast RFE programmes have not in past generated much listener reaction, but this has changed with Facing Justice.

"Listeners call us to ask how they can hear again some information that was presented in the programme. This shows that people are still interested in issues related to war crimes issues," she said.

Dino Lolic, editor-in-chief of Radio TNT from Travnik, says his radio station records this programme and broadcasts it twice a week.

"Feedback from our listeners has been very good and we will continue broadcasting Facing Justice in the

future,” said Lolic.

Arnes Grbesic, editor-in-chief of the Radio Zos from Doboj Jug, RS, also said first reactions to our programme were very encouraging.

“We thought the audience were tired of this subject, so we did not expect such feedback. However, it is obvious that a professional project like this one will always have its audience,” he said.

Tina Jelin, editor-in-chief of Radio Studio 88 from Mostar, says she was quite surprised by the instant success of Facing Justice.

“Many listeners have called us to express their opinion, saying that the content of Facing Justice is journalistically very professional, especially when it comes to sensitive issues such as war crimes,” Jelin told us.

Zeljka Mihaljevic, editor-in-chief of the Radio Studio N in Livno, said she wanted more transitional justice issues raised on the programme “because Bosnia is still recovering from the consequences of the war, and truth, justice and reconciliation will be a crucial part of that recovery process.

“The more people have access to this sort of information, the easier it will be for them to start trusting each other again. Personally, I think that unbiased information is the most important thing for the country completely torn apart by various versions of the truth.

“Those who want to hear ‘pure’ information that is not being spoilt by personal comments or biased opinion should listen to this programme.”

Elvira Jahic, a journalist from Sarajevo, said the media has a very important role in the reconciliation process in the former Yugoslavia and programmes such as Facing Justice can help a lot.

“People in Bosnia must face their recent past. Every part of society has to find strength to deal with the consequences of the war on its own. Because of the negative role journalists played before and during the war, their responsibility now is greater than ever. As long as there is space for biased reporting on war crimes issues, it will be possible to manipulate Bosnian citizens,” she said.

She added that the programme was a “rare example of responsible and professional journalism” and that “this is the project that we all have to support, for our own sake”.

Dragana Dardic, a human rights activist from RS, listed several reasons why Facing Justice is so important.

“Firstly, wartime events in the former Yugoslavia are being discussed by professional journalists. Things politicians are hiding from us and things we cannot read between the lines are being revealed by IWPR and RFE reporters,” she said.

“Secondly, the fact is that we are all fed up with wartime stories that are being told from a nationalist perspective. However, there is a lack of objective and balanced reporting on these issues, and this is what we get from Facing Justice.”

She added that the programme already has its regular audience and wished us even greater success in the future.

Milorad Labus, a journalist from Banja Luka, said that in his opinion “technically and professionally” Facing Justice “is simply excellent”.

“It may seem to someone that war crimes are an easy subject to deal with due to a lot of information which can be found in court documents, as well as in witness statements and discussions on these issues, but that’s not really the case. If this is not done in the right way, the consequences can be really grave. Bad quality programmes can only induce language of hatred and recall dark shadows of the past,” he said.

“Judging from what I’ve heard so far, RFE and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting have managed to produce high quality programmes. I believe they will make Bosnian citizens - especially those in Republika Srpska - think about war crimes in a different way.”

Jugoslav Jevdjic, a manager from Bijeljina, RS, says he listens to the programme regularly.

“I think the format is excellent and most of all interesting, because it provides us with a lot of reports, comments and facts. My opinion is that war crimes is a subject that will be talked about for decades, but it is important to view recent events in the former Yugoslavia from unbiased perspective, as Facing Justice does. That is the only way for all of us to find out the real truth.”

Muharem Kunalić, an economist from Prijedor and a Bosniak returnee to the Serb municipality, says returnees are particularly interested in all programmes that deal with war crimes, especially with trials for crimes committed during the war in Bosnia and in the region.

“Until now, there have been many unsuccessful reports on these issues in the newspapers and local radio and TV stations and most of them were biased, unlike Facing Justice,” he said.

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