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Statement of the Novosti journalists and editors:

Stop the attack against freedom of speech

Novosti's journalists and editors would like to inform the general public, local and international institutions, professional associations and civil society organizations about an ongoing attack against freedom of speech and the rights of ethnic minorities in Croatia started by the ultraconservative nongovernmental organization "In the Name of the Family" (U ime obitelji).

On February 13 this organization held a press conference in front of the Croatian Parliament building demanding the closure of the Novosti weekly. On the same day, it sent to the Government, the Parliament, the Council on National Minorities, the Government Audit Office and the State Attorney's Office a document titled "Report on the Abuse of State Budget Funds for the Serbian National Minority", in which it calls for the criminal prosecution of Novosti's journalists, editors and publishers.

During the mentioned press conference as well as in the "Report" a number of unfounded and malicious accusations have been made, the most important being the one that the "Novosti insults the Republic of Croatia and spreads hatred and intolerance towards the majority Croatian people". In the following days the members of this organization repeatedly made the same accusations in a number of Croatian media outlets. On February 20 they started an online petition for the closure of the Novosti and flooded the e-mail system of the Council on National Minorities with thousands of automatic e-mails.

These actions constitute a dangerous and orchestrated campaign of nationalism and xenophobia aimed at marking the journalists of Novosti as enemies of the state and national traitors. Further, they aim to instigate public rage against the Serb National Council, which is the umbrella organization of the Serbian national minority in Croatia, therefore against the Serbian national minority in general.

Novosti journalists and editors would like to emphasize that this brutal attack against press freedom and minority rights, both of which are guaranteed by the Croatian Constitution, takes place in the context of a wider nationalist offensive against the independent media, civil society and cultural institutions. In the past year similar campaigns have been undertaken against the Agency for Electronic Media, the Croatian Audio-Visual Center and non-profit media. Moreover, the model of state funding for non-profit media has been abolished

precisely as a result of the pressure made by “In the Name of the Family”. The same organization has in the past several years persistently and actively created a homophobic atmosphere, the consequence of which is the recent tear gas attack against LGBTIQ community in Zagreb.

Novosti has received recognition and support from media experts in the whole region, while the professional organization the Croatian Journalists' Association condemned “In the Name of the Family” for spreading hatred against ethnic and other minority groups. It has also warned that the ongoing campaign represents an extremely dangerous threat to democracy in Croatia.

This statement has been referred to a number of local and international institutions, organizations for the protection of press freedom and diplomatic missions in the Republic of Croatia.