

Media and communication  
as factors of stability and  
cooperation in South-  
Eastern Europe

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**MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION AS FACTORS OF STABILITY AND  
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## Introduction

It is nowadays widely recognised that media largely contributed to conflicts in South-Eastern Europe not merely by biased reporting, but by systematic provision of legitimacy to totalitarian leaderships and by construction of the war itself - nationalising, mobilising and emotionalising the public sphere by use of specific "patriotic journalism" and "war propaganda" techniques.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, democracy and political stability in the region strongly rely on provisions for freedom of speech, professional media activity and responsible public communication. The fall of previous non-democratic regimes and the end of war in the region brought about sudden changes for which the new elites were insufficiently prepared for. They have been facing major problems with general transition in the media sphere, establishment of media legal framework, professional work and education of journalists, public relations officers, state officials and other people involved with public communication. There exists a true danger of ill practices in the field of media regulation, media ownership and privatisation, as well as in media relations and public communication activities. All these developments in the media field have been observed by most of the key international institutions involved with maintenance of peace, stability and human rights in the region and in Europe at large, which have also attempted to provide assistance in this respect. However, the western model of free media and democratic communication cannot be simply copied, but rather transferred to the particular political, social and cultural environment of the targeted countries in the region. One must take into account the very sensitive factor of public opinion - the perceptions of the general population, specific interest groups and opinion leaders, and base relevant projects primarily on local needs and initiatives. Here Slovenia can share its unique experience of transition with other countries in the region and help them to avoid mistakes in this field. This paper will outline main activities of international organisations (OSCE, NATO, Council of Europe, Stability Pact) in the media field and introduce some relevant Slovene proposals to this aim.

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<sup>1</sup> See in Hrvatin, B. Sandra and Trampuž, Martina. 2000. Enjoy Your Enemy or How the Kosovo (Media) War Broke Out. *Javnost*, 7 (3), 77-86.

## OSCE

Through different stages of CSCE/OSCE evolution one can observe a consistent promotion and upgrading of freedom of expression, free flow of information and freedom of media as basic human rights. In order to ensure even higher level of commitment with the norms and standards accepted, the position of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media was established and Freimut Duve of Germany was appointed to take over the Vienna based office in December 1997.<sup>2</sup> His mandate stems from the realisation that "freedom of expression is a fundamental and internationally recognised human right and a basic component of a democratic society and that free, independent and pluralistic media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government". He is endowed with the task to observe relevant media developments in all participating States and to advocate and promote full compliance with OSCE principles and commitments regarding freedom of expression and free media. Here, he assumes an early-warning function in relation to governments, parliaments, the media and NGOs, and concentrates on rapid response to serious problems caused by, inter alia, obstruction of media activities and unfavourable working conditions for journalists. The latter are addressed either through interventions with governments and visits, or by outlining issues and problems that are characteristic of more than one participating state, for example, so-called "censorship by killing", "structural censorship", misuse of libel and defamation laws, value added taxes on the media etc.

A report on International Assistance to Media in Southeastern Europe, commissioned by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and prepared by Mark Thompson, closely looked into many obstacles faced by the local media and governments in establishing free journalistic media in the region. It was an important lessons-learned study as it attempted to address questions of how the international community can help and whether there was a need for a relevant legislation to be introduced by the international community.<sup>3</sup> It showed that OSCE has been the main international organisation involved with the matter of post-conflict media development. Offices with this particular task are operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, OSCE Missions in Croatia and Macedonia (FYMO) also deal with support and assistance to independent media.

In his capacity as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Freimut Duve has done his utmost to improve the media situation in Serbia and counter the state propaganda: "...the basic questions of common security focus today, a quarter-century later, on other issues: above all, on how the always latent danger of ethnically motivated propaganda, and the instrumentalization of the media for that purpose, can be countered."<sup>4</sup> After democratic changes at the end of year 2000 an OSCE Mission was newly established in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, carrying also an important media mandate. Currently, the mission in FRY focuses on electronic media and the need for a coherent and politically non-biased policy in the field of licensing. The role of public service broadcasting in the whole region calls for further attention and therefore, the OSCE media office intends to organise a meeting on that topic later this year. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has been also watching with great concern the situation in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, in particular as to the reporting and editorialising on the military developments around Tetovo.

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<sup>2</sup> Mandate of the OSCE Representation on Freedom of Media, Decision No. 193, 5 November 1997, PC Journal No. 137, Agenda Item 1 - at [www.osce.org/fom/mandate](http://www.osce.org/fom/mandate)

<sup>3</sup> Statement at the Permanent Council (Review of Current Issues), 1 June 2000 - at [www.osce.org/fom/staffreports](http://www.osce.org/fom/staffreports)

<sup>4</sup> Introduction by Freimut Duve, Yearbook 99/00 - at [www.osce.org/fom/publications](http://www.osce.org/fom/publications)

To this topic a regional conference on Free Media in Southeast Europe: the Protection of Journalists and Their Role in Reconciliation, Promoting Interethnic Peace and Preventing Conflicts was organised in Zagreb in February 2001. Another major project has been initiated at the first half of year 2001 - a traveling gymnasium, so-called mobile.culture.container, was set on the road from Tuzla throughout the Balkan region for the next two years.<sup>5</sup>

## **NATO**

"NATO is a democratic Alliance, and public support is crucial to its success," recently stated Secretary General Lord Robertson in a speech with an ominous title "Communicate".<sup>6</sup> Here he explained that no matter how convincing one's strategic rationale for a given policy might be, it must, above all, be understood by a broader public, or else it might not be politically sustainable. In his opinion one of the worst examples in this respect would be Kosovo where NATO had considerable problems in sustaining its policy and it looked more or less like a propaganda contest between NATO and Belgrade. In conclusion to this Lord Robertson declared: "The communication problem in Kosovo was a serious one, and we should never again be caught so unprepared...in the future crisis situations, the Alliance will be better prepared on the information front."

On the point of public information it is explicitly stressed that "responsibility for explaining national defense and security policy and each member country's role within the Alliance rests with the individual member governments",<sup>7</sup> as NATO is an inter-governmental organisation. NATO's Office of Information and Press complements the public information activities undertaken within each country, manages Organisation's day-to-day relations with the press and media, and provides information to respond to the interest in the Alliance from non-member nations, in particular member countries of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Mediterranean Cooperation Group, as well as Russia and Ukraine. In addition, there has been a growing demand for information programmes to explain NATO's role in bringing the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia to an end and creating the conditions for future stability in the region. One recognises that the stabilisation process of the region is in a steady progress, thus, it has to be managed carefully, if it is to succeed in the long run, with determined engagement, patience and cooperation, also in respect to media and public communication.<sup>8</sup>

## **Council of Europe**

For many years, the Council of Europe has carried out a wide range of activities aimed at guaranteeing and promoting freedom of expression and information and freedom of the media in the countries of South-Eastern Europe, in accordance with the principles enshrined in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and other Council of Europe legal and political instruments in the media sector. In respect to the region the Council's Media Division attempts to set out a regulatory framework for freedom of expression and the media in line with Council of Europe standards, and to ensure that the day-to-day application of the

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<sup>5</sup> Report to the Permanent Council, 5 June 2001 - at [www.osce.org/fom/staffreports](http://www.osce.org/fom/staffreports)

<sup>6</sup> Speech by Lord Robertson, NATO Secretary General, at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 23. April 2001 - at [www.nato.int/docu/speech](http://www.nato.int/docu/speech)

<sup>7</sup> Public Information, Chapter 7: Policy and Decision-making, Nato Handbook, May 2001 - at [www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001](http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001)

<sup>8</sup> "NATO and Europe. Key steps for European Integration - Promoting Peace and Prosperity in Europe", Presentation by NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson, at the Wilton Park Conference, Dubrovnik, 31 May 2001 - at [www.nato.int/docu/speech/2001](http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2001)

regulatory framework complies with these standards and that the media can develop in such a way as to promote a climate of tolerance and mutual understanding. Its bilateral and regional activities include the organisation of information and awareness-raising activities for official circles (judges, civil servants, regulatory authorities) and training activities for media companies and professionals which complements the legislative expertise under the Council of Europe's co-operation and assistance programmes.<sup>9</sup>

Among the many initiatives taken in the region, one should mention the Conference on "the media for a democratic Europe", organised by the Council of Europe and ANEM (Association of Independent Electronic Media) in Belgrade already in December 1998, as well as the numerous training sessions for journalists from different independent media carried out in co-operation with institutions like the Alternative Information Network or the European Journalism Centre. Soon after the major political changes in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, at the end of 2000, a second Conference on "the media for a democratic Europe: the transformation of broadcasters in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was organised in order to identify concrete lines of action to be taken to secure the transformation of the regulatory framework for the broadcast media in the FRY.<sup>10</sup> Also a regional meeting for regulatory bodies from South-East Europe was held in Budapest in February 2001, under the title "Strategies for effectiveness, transparency and independence", where the main issues discussed were the independence and powers of broadcasting regulatory bodies, as well as specific problems concerning licensing practices and monitoring by regulatory authorities were.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, a joint initiative by the Council of Europe and the European Union was made to adapt the legal framework in the media field in Serbia.<sup>12</sup> This will provide an urgent assistance to the media experts who are preparing a new legislative framework for the media, and assist also the competent ministries and other public authorities in the further preparation and subsequent application of new laws and regulations. A series of awareness-raising and training activities, as well as expert and advisory missions will be organised in the areas of broadcasting sector, general media law and European standards of freedom of expression.

## **Stability Pact**

On 8 June 2000, the Regional Table of the Stability Pact adopted the Charter for Media Freedom, a document which constitutes basic grounds for strengthening independence of the media in the region.<sup>13</sup> Hereby, the participating states of the Stability Pact acknowledged "that freedom of the media, free flow of information and ideas and open discussion, without the interference of public authorities, play a fundamental role in the development of free, stable and democratic societies; are prerequisites for the establishment of mutual understanding and good relations among states and their peoples". Beside that, they stressed the need "for a more active and better informed public debate in order to achieve the objectives of peace, stability and mutual understanding that underpin the Stability Pact", as well as "for cooperation among

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<sup>9</sup> Council of Europe contribution to the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, Media component, Strasbourg, 2 May 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Conclusions and recommendations of the conference at [www.humanrights.coe.int/media/](http://www.humanrights.coe.int/media/)

<sup>11</sup> Summary of proceedings at [www.humanrights.coe.int/media/atcm/2001/Hungary/REPORT-Budapest-23.02.01.rtf](http://www.humanrights.coe.int/media/atcm/2001/Hungary/REPORT-Budapest-23.02.01.rtf)

<sup>12</sup> Joint initiative between the European Union and the Council of Europe to adapt the legal framework in the media field in Serbia, Strasbourg, 12 April 2001.

<sup>13</sup> The original document at [www.stabilitypact.org](http://www.stabilitypact.org)

media professionals from the region contributes to enhancing mutual confidence and reducing the risk of tensions in South Eastern Europe".

The governments, the interested parties and organisations associated with the Stability Pact obliged themselves to cooperate to protect freedom of expression and to encourage observation and implementation of the leading principles of free media. Here special attention has been paid to the following: media and other relevant laws in accordance to international standards and commitments, including defamation laws and attempts for censorship; development of pluralistic and accessible electronic and printed media; provisions for economic independence of the media, for free access to information, for media access by minorities, and for protection of journalistic sources; development of media networks in the region; legal framework for Public Service Broadcasters and state news agencies; establishment of independent broadcasting regulatory bodies; importance of media codes of ethics and self regulation; enactment of laws related to the use of the media to incite unlawful acts of racism, xenophobia or violence; promotion of the highest standards of professional journalism, including independent and diverse information and opinion.

Accordingly, Media Task Force, which was established within the Working Table on Democratisation and Human Rights, prepared an Action Plan outlining necessary steps to implement the provision of the Media Charter.<sup>14</sup> These include the publication and promotion of the Media Charter; establishment of national contact points and working groups; preparation of country-specific work-plans; development of regional co-operation in the media field; enhancement of the Media Task Force itself; support for the independent media in the FRY; encouragement of local ownership; and intensified efforts to inform Stability Pact partners and donors about activities of the Media Task Force.

By the end of year 2000 donors committed in total 29.25 mio Euro to 30 media projects in the region, covering media education and training, media assistance, support for media institutions and networks in the region, media programmes for FRY and Bosnia and Herzegovina etc.<sup>15</sup> To date, Working Groups have been established in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia, contacts have been made to relevant experts in Slovenia and Montenegro as well. The Media Task Force activities have been given a full recognition and support at the last meeting of the Working Table 1, with the conclusions that media are one of the priority areas. Here, participants also confirmed the nomination of Mr. Michael Zenner, from German Foreign Ministry, for a new Chairman of the Media Task Force.<sup>16</sup>

## **Slovenia**

Within Slovenia's working programme during its co-chairmanship of the Stability Pact's Working Table on Democratisation and Human Rights (January-June 2001) it has been planned for a workshop on Democratisation and Support for the Independent Media in South-Eastern Europe (by Slovene Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Culture); an expert conference of the Assisting Electronic Media in the South-Eastern European Countries (Slovene Ministry of Culture, Slovene media organisations); and an international conference

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<sup>14</sup> Adopted on 18 July 2000 - at [www.stabilitypact.org](http://www.stabilitypact.org)

<sup>15</sup> Final commitment for the Working Table 1 - Democratisation and Human rights was 365.81 million Euro and all in all, for Quick Start Package of projects and programmes was 1,699.17 billion Euro. In Note on the status as of December 31, 2000 of pledges to the March 2000 Regional Funding Conference for South-Eastern Europe, European Commission/World Bank, Joint Office for South East Europe, May 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Chairman's Conclusions, 4th Meeting of Working Table on democratisation and Human Rights, Portorož, 14-15 May 2001 - at [www.stabilitypact.org](http://www.stabilitypact.org)

on legislation in the field of radio and television - Public Services and Commercial TV and Radio (Slovene Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovene National Commission for UNESCO).

In November 2000 a group of young Slovene academicians and experts in the media and communication fields founded Media Forum, Center for Public Communication, Ljubljana, which is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organisation, sponsored by the US State Department and the Open Society Fund.<sup>17</sup> Media Forum engages with media and communication related projects in the wider region of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Main aims of its activities are as following:

1. setting, strengthening and promoting standards in public communication, including relations of political representatives toward media
2. ensuring and improving transparency of media regulation, media law practice and media ownership in the region
3. offering information, advise and expertise in the field of media and communication
4. educating for professional journalistic and PR practices in the region

The projects work toward involving all countries of the former Yugoslavia, and here focus on journalists, PR officers, NGO representatives, state representatives (officials, diplomats), media and communication experts, other professionals and practitioners in the field of media and communication. So far, an integrative and interactive web page, *Media Law on Line*, was conceived which includes a compilation of legal regulation of media activity, media self-regulation provisions, court decisions and rulings in the cases involving media, expert opinion and articles related to media issues, media discussions in the MF chat room etc. for Slovenia and other countries of the region. At the same time an independent education project under the MF's auspices, *Propaganda*, brings together experts and students of communications, marketing, and art to build on the relevant theory and implement it in the form of creative, public awareness campaigns, with motives like fight against torture (for Amnesty International) or legalisation of soft drugs (for Student Organisation at the University of Ljubljana).

Many further projects and activities have been proposed directly to the Media Task Force of the Stability Pact and also to the Council of Europe's Media Division contributing to this part, in the following fields:

#### 1. Media regulation

In the process of passing a new media legislation in all targeted countries, one should attempt to connect legal and media experts and professionals in the region, preparing the new legislation in accordance with the Council of Europe's and the European Union's provisions. Particular questions should be addressed in expert forums: the role of public television, protection of journalists, development of profession codes of conduct, establishment of press and media councils or complaint commissions. One should provide also for an easily

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<sup>17</sup> Founders of the Media Forum are:

- Sandra Bašič Hrvatina, Ph.D. in Communication Sciences, Head of the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, and Chair of the Slovene Broadcasting Council  
- Kristina Plavšak, M.A. in International Affairs, former Press Secretary to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, and currently, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences  
- Simona Zatler, B.A. in Law and Journalism, renown expert and author in the field of media law  
See more at [www.media-forum.org](http://www.media-forum.org)

accessible overview of key documents (with case law) and activities on media regulation by the main European institutions.

## 2. Media ownership and privatisation

With the opening of the media markets one should provide for a systematic and controlled transition to new forms of (non-state) media ownership by private and foreign capital. An establishment of a regional media register with current data on the ownership shares and other relevant information would secure the necessary transparency in the field and at the same time attract potential reliable investors. Also exchange visits by experts from European institutions and countries in the region sharing experience and advise with media institutions still in transition largely contribute to this aim.

## 3. Media relations and public communication

As a heritage of former non-democratic and in-stability (war) driven regimes, perceptions of mistrust and even hostility prevail in the relations between media and state officials, thus various actors (PR officers, diplomats, NGOs) intensively communicate with domestic and foreign publics. Therefore, they have to be educated as to the established standards and practices of "fair play" media relations and responsible and efficient public communication.

## 4. Journalistic practices

Western models of professional journalistic practices are only gradually acquired by the media in the region, due to the past, but still existent state and political dependence as well as to strong nationalist mentality. Beside that, the transition to market regulated media created a vacuum allowing for yellow press driven, aggressive journalism and low quality journalistic stories. Therefore, one should provide for a proper education and training of the journalists and editors in the region - a regional journalistic school could be established in Slovenia on the basis of good cooperation between the Department of Journalism at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana and the Journalistic School from Lille in France.

Currently Media Forum with cooperation by partner institutions prepares seminars on media regulation and the state of research journalism in the region (with South East Europe Media Organisation, Vienna) to take place in Autumn 2001. In the upcoming months it intends to perform a comprehensive public opinion survey on the state of media in the region, in particular on attitudes of the general public, the opinion leaders and the newsmakers themselves toward media (with Center for Public Opinion Research, Ljubljana). It is also closely involved with the preparations for the International Press Institute's World Congress to be held May 2002 in Ljubljana.

## **Conclusion**

The outlined projects and initiatives by key European institutions in the media field surely work toward a common aim but with diversified approaches which all in all, produce both effects, of overlapping and of complementarity. The OSCE Representative for Freedom of Media appears the most progressive in his “political/public appeal” authority, adequately supported by a media-development function of the institution. The Council of Europe consistently follows the line of its leading principles of human rights protection also in the media field, providing expertise and assistance on the most important questions of transition like new media and broadcasting legislation in the region. NATO in its efforts to compensate for communication failures during its intervention on the FRY tries to focus on broader (public) implications of its security and military activities. Also European Union will have to work more in this direction if it wants to effectively strengthen the role of its Common Foreign and Security Policy in the South-Eastern Europe.

A potential infrastructure for synergy of all these activities is offered and also increasingly used within the Stability Pact. However, still more effort is needed to provide for a higher visibility of the Media Task Force activities and a closer involvement of local partners in its projects. This would also contribute to better state of being informed about the Stability Pact and thereby, boost its overall positive image in the countries of the region.

On this point Slovenia plays a considerable role as a bridge between European countries and Southeastern Europe, exporting stability and cooperation to the region. Or as put by former US President during his visit to Slovenia on 21 June 1999: “We must build a Europe with no frontline states - a Europe undivided, democratic, and at peace for the first time in history. And Slovenia can lead the way.” The meeting of Presidents Bush and Putin in Ljubljana in these days affirms Slovene efforts to make its mediatory role in Europe and the world more visible and better recognised, bearing a special symbolic significance on the very tenth anniversary of its independence and statehood.