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*"Regional Security and Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe"*  
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**COMMUNICATING SECURITY AND COOPERATION**  
**IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE**  
**Role of Public Opinion, Media and Communication**

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## Introduction

Communication is the lubricant of every society. Communicative interaction explains political behaviour and preconditions any lasting communities of integration as they rely on:

*“a matter of mutual sympathy and loyalties; of ‘we-feeling’, trust, and mutual consideration; of partial identification in terms of self-images and interests; of mutually successful predictions of behavior, and of cooperative action in accordance with it-in short, a matter of perpetual dynamic process of mutual attention, communication, perception of needs, and responsiveness in the process of decision-making.”* (Deutsch et al. 1957: 36)

Also democracy and political stability in South-Eastern Europe today strongly rely on provisions for freedom of speech, professional media activity and responsible public communication. Through years media largely contributed to conflicts in the region 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 (Hrvatín&Trampuz 2000). Thus, 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.

This paper will explore the role of public opinion, media and communication activities concerning security, peace keeping and integration in societies of South-Eastern Europe. It attempts to move further from the common debates on the topic, not merely showing that media, public opinion and communication in the region do matter, but more importantly, how

and why the interaction processes (can/should) take place in the real environments of South-Eastern Europe. First, it will introduce global trends in media and communication, reshaping international affairs, altering conduct and perceptions of foreign policy, diplomacy and war. In addition, the role of public opinion as the “new international force” will be discussed. Further on, I will address the question how (can/should) foreign policy and security “speak” to people. This will lead to an outline of main initiatives and projects by international organisations (OSCE, Council of Europe and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in particular) in the media and public diplomacy field. I will conclude with a study of (potential) Slovene involvement in this respect, with some relevant proposals and other policy recommendations to this aim.

### **Brave New Media World**

In today's world of a revolution in communications and information as well as of global interdependency, a medialised politics became a general reality. One can observe such a trend specifically in the field of international and foreign affairs where state and other actors use communication channels and public relations to a large extent to improve on the content and in particular, on the image of their policies. In a new media-dominated governing system international television networks like CNN brought about "the constitution of a worldwide homogeneously time-zoned bios politikon, instantaneously affecting world wide political action or interaction via press conferences or public resolutions transmitted around the world" (Volkner, 1999: 3 in Thussu, 2000: 12). One argues that a major share of bilateral and multilateral relations among states is shaped by the international media, or vice versa, that all major "wars" are "fought" through the media (Ammon 2001; Gilboa 2001; Thussu 2000).

Furthermore, "the realpolitik of the new era is cyberpolitik" in which the actors are no longer just states and raw power can be counted or fortified by information power. Internet technologies enable virtual communities to unite to counter government efforts, from use of violence to the closing off of existing media channels. These take their cases to the international court of public opinion, whose influence over states has grown as its means to reach an ever greater audience has multiplied. A worldwide network is the key feature of the environment in which diplomats and generals operate (Rothkopf, 1997: 325-330).

These revolutionary changes have altered the meaning and understanding of power in contemporary world politics. A nation or leader's image and control of information flow, and not just their military and economic power, contribute to their status in international affairs. Power is passing from the "capital-rich" to the "information-rich", "soft power" counts more and more. This is the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion. It works by convincing others to follow, or getting them to agree to, norms and institutions that produce the desired behaviour. Soft power can rest on the appeal of one's ideas or the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others (Nye 1990; Nye&Owens 1996) .

Therefore, nowadays political leaders spend as much time explaining or justifying a conflict to their public opinion and to the media as they actually do running them. Or as put in the words of NATO spokesman: "The ability of the media to dramatise events and create a global audience for a conflict puts policy makers under pressure to take decisions faster and with less time for reflection than at any previous time in human history." (Shea, 1999: 5) However, one must and can keep in control: "Leaders have to dominate the media and not be dominated by it. Successful conflicts cannot be media driven. Winning the media campaign is just as important as winning the military campaign." (Shea 1999: 8) This realisation holds true also for peace keeping operations: "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."(Robertson 2001a) Thus, to secure a steady progress of the stabilisation process in post-war regions like the South-Eastern Europe, 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 (Robertson 2001b).

### **Public Opinion - May Force Be With You**

Public opinion, largely shaped by the media, has become even more influential in foreign affairs as before and nowadays represents the common arbiter among competing policies, politicians, and statesmen (Ammon 2001: 84-86). When debating the role of public opinion, two contradictory lines of thought can be distinguished, the first arguing about the volatility and inadequacy of public opinion as a stable and effective foreign policy, whereas the second considers public attitudes quite stable and consistent over time and actually exercising a

strong influence on foreign policy-making (Risse-Kappen 1991). Some authors claim that the analysis of public opinion is usually one-sided, taking into account only the impact of something called "the populace" on the statesman, the diplomat or the military leader. "Public opinion, however, is not an autonomous force; it is frequently organised by voluntary organisations or a specific political group" (Sofer 1991: 73).

Empirical research proved that the policy impact on public opinion does not depend solely on the specific issues involved or on the particular pattern of public attitudes as more on the domestic structures and the coalition-building processes in the respective country (Risse-Kappen 1991). Here, also the foreign policy elites take a considerable role while translating their decisions, moves, positions to public opinion (Almond 1960). Thus, a study suggests that public possesses general orientations that help to inform and anchor its opinions on specific foreign-policy issues. While political judgments in the international sphere must be made under considerable uncertainty and without many of the interpretative aids commonly used in the domestic arena, public relies on its general knowledge to guide the processing of more specific information (Hurwitz&Peffley 1987). Therefore, one should analyse public opinion and foreign policy, as well as diplomacy, as in the process of interaction, constructing each other through existent domestic coalitions and policy networks, in the context of domestic societies (Plavšak 1996).

The public's understanding in the respective post-war region is initially influenced by perceptions of how and why the peacekeeper is there in the first instance (Kiehl 2001: 136). Publics, thus, do not exist in a vacuum, patiently awaiting an Information Operation message from the interveners. In the absence of a coordinated information policy on the part of the multinational force, the information vacuum will be filled by those whose intentions are hostile to the interests of the force. Political and/or military leaders may misrepresent public opinion to justify their own agendas (Kiehl 2001: 139).

It is important to note that public opinion across the region is dominated by day to day concerns such as poverty, inflation and corruption, as to the SEE Public Agenda Survey, the first ever professional measurement of public opinion undertaken simultaneously throughout

South-Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> These public concerns, however, have little connection with ethnic, historical and international issues which at least a section of the ruling elite in the region considers important. In addition, the survey also reveals a critical lack of trust in official institutions of all kinds, domestic or international, across the region as a whole, with the notable exception of Kosovo. This in itself can represent an important obstacle to development, as lack of trust means a lack of respect for rules and laws.

### **How Foreign Policy and Security Speak to People?**

“Foreign policy does not necessarily have to “shout loudly to be heard a little”; it simply has to speak clearly and in familiar terms, perhaps rattling a few sabers for emphasis.”

(Hurwitz&Peffley 1987: 1115) Scholars and practitioners agree that if policy-makers want to set the agenda and not leave it to the media, they must have one. The existence of policy that can command public support against emotional swings stirred up by television imagery is key. In the absence of persuasive government strategy, the media will be catalytic (Hoge 1994: 2). Therefore, in the "media shaped" world public diplomacy, defined as "the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly another government's foreign policy decision," (Signitzer and Coombs 1992: 138), adopts new dimensions, being concerned with media and communication management, and as some argue, developing to a genuine "communicative action" (Lose 2001).

While combining "soft" methods of media and public relations, on one side and on the other, also "hard" methods of persuasion and propaganda, more or less covered in subtle forms of cultural, education, promotion etc. programmes, it attempts to bypass the constraints of foreign governments and reach directly into the hearts and minds of foreign audiences. Hereby, the traditional "high politics" grounds become an ever-widening, "all walks of life" arena that encompasses nongovernmental organisations, multinational corporations, regional and local governments, academic institutions, media and other important players. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup>The regional survey poll was performed 2001-2002 by International IDEA - Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, an intergovernmental organisation headquartered in Sweden. It involved a total of over 10,000 in-home face-to-face interviews, conducted in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (with a special survey for Republika Srpska), Croatia, Macedonia, Bulgaria nad Romania. At [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

also the actors in public diplomacy can no longer be confined to the profession of diplomats but include various individuals, groups and institutions who engage in international and intercultural communication activities which do have a bearing on the political relationships between two countries. (Signitzer and Coombs 1992: 139)

Specific communication activities support also peacekeeping operations - International Public Information encompasses traditional civilian public diplomacy, public affairs and press relations, international educational and other exchanges, professional media training, international broadcasting as well as traditional overt military information operations, press relations, public affairs and psychological operations. Here public diplomacy includes the use by the civilian foreign policy establishment of personal contacts, press and multimedia tools, training and long-term exchange programmes in order to inform foreign publics of a given policy, affect attitudes positively towards that policy and influence behaviour favourable to the foreign policy interests of the state employing it (Kiehl 2001: 138-145). When military information operation takes place in the absence of civilian public diplomacy or without close coordination between military and civilian practitioners of information operation and public diplomacy, there is a very real danger of counter-productive operations and working at cross-purposes (Kiehl 2001: 140). "Effective communication helps to dispel rumour, to counter disinformation and to secure the cooperation of the local populations. It can provide leverage in dealing with leaders of rival groups, enhance security of UN personnel and serves as a force multiplier." (Kiehl 2001: 144)

### **International Efforts in Addressing Local Situations**

Any communication programme or project in the South-Eastern Europe should be tailored to each specific environment, with specific economic, political, social, cultural, media situation, with specific needs and perceptions of local population, including understanding of security in all its complexity and diverse dimensions. How do initiatives and activities by international organisations meet such requirements?

### ***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. After democratic changes at the end of year 2000 an OSCE Mission was newly established in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, carrying an important media mandate. 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

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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)

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>

### ***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 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>5</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 South-Eastern Europe, in particular in Serbia and Montenegro.<sup>6</sup> This provides 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, expert and advisory missions, as well as expert conferences have been organised and carried out in the areas of broadcasting sector, general media law and European standards of freedom of expression.

### ***Stability Pact***

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

<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe contribution to the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, Media component, Strasbourg, 2 May 2001.

<sup>6</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.

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>7</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 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>8</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

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<sup>7</sup> The original document at [www.stabilitypact.org](http://www.stabilitypact.org)

<sup>8</sup> Adopted on 18 July 2000 - at [www.stabilitypact.org](http://www.stabilitypact.org)

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>9</sup> To date, Working Groups have been established in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia. While the Media Task Force works closely with country working groups, it attempts to involve local media professionals in the assesment of projects; to stimulate assistance to local organisations with a proven track record and to forge closer coopeation between donors, existing (local) organisations donors and government representatives.<sup>10</sup>

In Media Task Force's latest strategy (2001-2004) one states that "despite positive developments, the media in South Eastern Europe are still hampered by political influencing, economic dependance, lack of sound journalism training, weak professional structures and - in many cases - an unclear and unfinished legislative framework."<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, further activities will focus on the following areas of action: laws and regulation, transformation of state to public media, support for private and independent media, regional cooperation, professionalism, minorities, content and archiving. Planned projects include concrete activities like legal assistance for decriminalising defamation, South-Eastern TV News Exchange, training journalism trainers for network of centres,<sup>12</sup> permanent education of journalists from South-Eastern Europe, Summer school for young academics in journalism, Beta Economic news service, video letters, episodes on breakdown of JNA, investigative programme on war-related issues etc.

### **Slovenia - Shiny Star in the Balkans?**

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<sup>9</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>10</sup>Work Plan and Achievables 2002 - at [www.stabilitypact.org](http://www.stabilitypact.org)

<sup>11</sup>Support to Media in SEE - Strategy 2001-2004 - at [www.stabilitypact.org](http://www.stabilitypact.org)

<sup>12</sup>South-East European Network for Professionalization of the Media was created in February 2000 by 17 media centers and institutes in South Eastern Europe to raise journalism standards, improve media environment on the national and regional levels and encourage cooperation among media professionals. At [www.seenpm.org](http://www.seenpm.org)

It is commonly acknowledged that Slovenia plays a considerable role as a bridge between European countries and South-Eastern Europe, exporting stability and cooperation to the region. Or as put by former US President Clinton 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.” This point was again made in May 2002 at the opening of International Press Institute’s World Congress, the largest global meeting of journalists, editors, media, governments’ and international organisations’ representatives, which was held, with no coincidence, in Ljubljana: “The Slovenian media profoundly influenced and enabled the political reforms, and helped to initiate the secession from Belgrade, which ended on June 25, 1991 with the declaration of independence.”<sup>13</sup> With the realisation that the media was tragically entwined in the deadly cycle of violence in the Balkans, the debates at Ljubljana IPI Congress focused on what went wrong in the Balkans, and on specific questions of how to guarantee editorial independence and how to protect journalists in the regions of conflict. IPI’s affiliate, the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)<sup>14</sup> organised a topical seminar on “The Media and Conflict Prevention in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Thus, on the concrete level, how much is Slovenia truly involved with communicating security and cooperation in the region? Here one should point out to a study case of a highly successful project within the Stability Pact and its excellent implementation also in communication respect, i.e. the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the responding communication strategy “To Heal the Wounds of Earth and Soul” which in October 2000 received a prestigious award for public relations projects with social projects by International Public Relations Association in cooperation with the United Nations (Asanin&Vercic 2000: 126-132). Otherwise, evidence shows that Slovenia (again) takes a more laid back approach, with little concerted action and mainly through efforts by individual experts. Though co-chairing the Stability Pact’s Working Table on Democratisation and Human Rights (January-June 2001), Slovenia’s working plan included merely a workshop on Democratisation and Support for the Independent Media in

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<sup>13</sup>Opening Statement by the IPI Chairman Dr. Hugo Buetler, 10 May 2002

<sup>14</sup>SEEMO, founded by representatives of 23 media organisations from nine South East European countries in October 2000, is aimed at providing a platform for debates on relevant regional issues, informing journalists in South East Europe about on-going activities in the media field, developing exchange programmes, looking for

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 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).

So far no working group of media professionals has been established, and a sole non-governmental organisation, is partly involved with the media projects for the region. The Center for Media Policy at the Peace Institute focuses on the strengthening of the media community in Slovenia, the inclusion of experts in the drafting of media legislation, and the setting-up of self-regulation and accountability systems within the Slovene media. Besides, it encourages international contacts, the regional and international cooperation of media companies and professional associations, organises conferences and discussions, develops training, fellowship and exchange programmes for journalists and media experts, in particular from South-Eastern Europe.<sup>15</sup>

### **Conclusion - A Look Ahead**

The outlined projects and initiatives by key European institutions in the media field surely work toward a common aim in a long run - establishing “rules of the game” for players in the public /media space and thereby, providing grounds for security and stability, as well as for further integration and cooperation. They are well aware of the fact that 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. Still the very sensitive factor of public opinion - the perceptions of the general population, specific interest groups and opinion leaders, is complex to handle and that’s why, it is often difficult to base relevant projects truly on local needs and initiatives. Here they use diversified approaches which all in all, produce both effects, of overlapping and of complementarity.

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areas of cooperation between local journalist organisations and serving as a link to international press freedom organisations. More at [www.freemedia.at](http://www.freemedia.at)

<sup>15</sup>At [www.mirovni-institut.si](http://www.mirovni-institut.si)

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.

In my opinion Slovenia can share its unique experience of transition with other countries in the region and help them to avoid mistakes in this field. Furthermore, Slovenia with its infrastructure and know-how could become a meeting point and a communication network for setting, strengthening and promoting standards in public communication; ensuring and improving transparency of media regulation, media law practice and media ownership in the region; offering information, advice and expertise in the field of media and communication; educating for professional journalistic and PR practices in the region; supporting creative communication projects in the region etc.<sup>16</sup>

Slovenia should and/or could “lead the way” under the following headings:

#### *1. Media regulation*

In the process of passing a new media legislation in all targeted countries, Slovenia protagonists 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

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<sup>16</sup>Such an attempt has been made by Media Forum, Center for Public Communication, Ljubljana, an NGO founded by young Slovene academicians and experts in the media and communication fields.

conduct, establishment of press and media councils or complaint commissions. A Slovene institution should provide also for an easily accessible overview of key documents (with case law) and activities on media regulation of the main European institutions, as well as comparative media legislation of the countries in the region.

### *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 under Slovene auspices 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. Slovenia competently could provide for such education and training opportunities.

### *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.



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