

Montenegro, 9 October 2018

OSCE Conference: Media Sustainability and Successful Media Business Models
Opening Speech

Mr. Prime Minister Duško Marković,
Mr. Minister Alexander Bogdanovic,
Dear Ambassador Maryse Daviet,
Dear Ambassador Clemens Koja,
Excellences,
Dear representatives of the media in the region,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be back in Podgorica, and I thank the OSCE mission to Montenegro and the OSCE Mission to Skopje, as well as the association of South-East Europe of Media for their invitation and for organizing this important event with the participation of media representatives from all the region.

It is also a great pleasure also to be here with the Prime Minister, Dusko Markovic, with whom we have established a close dialogue and cooperation.

This conference, with such a high level and diverse participation, shows the growing attention in the region for the role of the media in the future of democracy, at a time of many transformations.

It also reflects how widely shared the concerns are, and the understanding of the new challenges and threats faced by media in the region.

It is right that this a time of courage and boldness for solving and facing such challenges.

Freedom of the media is a fragile cornerstone of democracy. It enables citizens to fully exercise their right to receive pluralistic information from diverse sources.

Media freedom is key to effectively hold those in power accountable of their acts and decisions. It also allows different voices to be heard, different options to be discussed. It safeguards our human rights and liberties. It is an enabling right on which depend many other rights and freedoms.

That is why it is crucial to ensure that together the legal framework, the political climate towards the press, the safety of journalists, and the economic environment will be supportive of a pluralistic and quality media landscape in the future.

This conference will more specifically focus on the issue of media sustainability, at a time when media are confronted to the tremendous impact of the digitalization and to the profound transformation of their Business Models.

And if we look at the situation of the Media in the region it's clear that we have to pay as much attention to the economic conditions of the development of the media as to the political and legal environment.

If the political environment and the legislation are positive, but without the necessary investment, without sufficient revenues, without fair economic rules for the development of the media, we will have a seemingly democratic media landscape, but with less and less media because of the disappearance of more newspapers and the difficulty to develop new media.

On the other hand if we don't have a respect for media freedom, with a free, safe and fair environment, there will be new initiatives and investments in media, but they will be determined by vested interests or political groups, and the result will be less diversity, less pluralism and less independent journalism.

That's why the topic of this conference is so important for me and is intimately linked to ensuring the role of media in democracy in the region.

Since my appointment in July 2017, I have intervened more than 40 times, on different cases, both publicly and in direct communication with the authorities or through legal reviews, about media freedom situations in the countries of the region.

The Western Balkans has seen tangible progress compared with ten years ago, but there is still a long road ahead.

During my visits in the region, I often heard that the laws pertaining to the media in South East Europe are good. And that's true, but too often we also see and we know that the implementation is defaulting.

We need good laws, and we can even improve the existing laws, and my office is very happy to provide legal reviews and recommendations to governments; including here in Montenegro and I have been very happy to work on this with Minister of Culture, Mr. Bogdanovic.

But it is not enough to have good laws if you don't have the respect for the spirit of the law, if there is a lack of political will to support and protect diversity and pluralism.

So, I will insist on some of the major challenges we are faced with in light of my interventions to the States of the region.

The first challenge remains the safety of journalists, and it was also noted by the Prime Minister.

In many States of South East Europe, we have seen journalists harassed and threatened for their reporting, and several have been attacked in the past months.

In May this year, Olivera Lakić was shot in her leg in front of her home in Podgorica. We met at that time.

There can be no impunity for such horrendous aggression which is an attack against the press as a whole. That's why, from the first day on, I have been in contact with the authorities and I follow with great attention the evolution of the investigation. It is crucial that all those involved are identified and face justice.

Unfortunately this was not the only incident of serious threats or physical attacks on journalists in the region in the past weeks and months.

In Albania, this summer, the house of journalist Klodiana Lala's parents was riddled with bullets from an automatic weapon.

The same month, in August, journalist Vladimir Kovačević from Bosnia and Herzegovina was badly beaten.

And we must never forget that there are still several cases of killed journalists which have not been resolved, such as the assassination of Dusko Jovanovic in May 2004.

That's why we have published, after our regional conference on Media freedom that we have organized last May in Struga, a set of precise recommendations on safety of journalists that we have addressed to the governments of the region:

- 1) Politicians and public officials should not create a hostile environment for the media through their statements and actions;
- 2) Any threats to media or journalists must be taken seriously and investigated;
- 3) Impunity shall not be tolerated. Perpetrators and masterminds of crimes against the media must be brought to justice;
- 4) Law enforcement, prosecutors and judges must treat attacks against journalists as a high priority and work with journalists' organisations on preventing and fighting attacks against journalists;
- 5) Special attention must be paid to the issue of safety of female journalists who face additional threats, including online.

But it takes more than safety and protection to ensure the development of independent and quality journalism.

This brings me to the topic of this conference, which is a second very important challenge for the region: the economic situation of the press.

In this conference today and tomorrow, we will discuss the options for economic sustainability of the media in a rapidly changing media landscape.

We have seen new online media arising in the region and some traditional media who have been successful in their adaptation to digitalization. There are many examples.

But most legacy media are facing a strain on resources from subscription on one side and from advertisement on the other side; and the modest size of the markets makes it more difficult than elsewhere to finance new models of development.

We know that in the U.S., The Washington Post or The New York Times, or even in Europe, some very important legacy newspapers have managed to transform with a lot of new subscriptions.

And this is very positive; it shows that there is an interest from the public for quality information and that people can be ready to pay for it. But, of course, the size of the market is different, and it's even easier for newspapers in English language than in other language, including in large countries.

This economic pressure is even stronger when media are also faced with unfair market conditions and politically controlled advertising.

So I think that we can discuss on the way to help the existing and new media find their sustainability here in the Western Balkans.

We see too many situations where the most important media are in the hands of a few industrial groups which use it for political or economic purposes outside of the media sphere. We also see many fragile independent media without the resources to have a chance to develop.

So, there is a need for more transparency when it comes to media funding, especially from the State and public entities, and a need of transparency also of media ownership.

The fragility of the press also impacts on quality and independence of journalism.

Too many journalists don't have a decent contract and a decent income. Quality journalism, investigative journalism is costly; and the independence of the press has a cost and this is a cost of better working conditions for journalists.

Media have to be creative to develop new viable business models: with paywalls, with voluntary contributions from readers, or by other formats such as non-profit foundations. We will discuss these and other options today, and I am very curious to learn from your insight and your experience.

The best guarantee for the future of media professionals is also the return of public interest, of public trust, in their work. To invest in trust means to invest in quality, in

schools of journalism for instance, in self-regulation, in ethical codes, and in fact-checking. We also have to face the dissemination of fake news and the lack of trust in the media.

Self-regulation is a very important challenge; it is an important tool to raise professional and ethical standards. This is even more important due to the level of manipulation of information that we see on the Internet.

We have been supporting, with the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, a very important programme of development of a Code of Ethics for journalists here in the country, and the Media Council for Self-Regulation; and I wish that this Council will be able to continue its mission.

The support to journalists' Codes of Ethics and Media Council is really a priority.

Of course, digital media literacy is also very important and must be included in school curriculums.

The fourth challenge I would mention is the role of Public Service Broadcasters.

Even if this conference is about the private sector, we can notice that public service broadcasters are facing some of the same problems, including for their restructuring. The Public Service must also keep this important role to maintain high quality standards, representing benchmarks for the all other media actors.

There is a need for investing in public media in the region, and to ensure their political independence and financial sustainability.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference is important to help us better understand and explore the most recent evolution of the media landscape and to imagine more supportive policies for the development of diverse and innovative media.

Everybody can play its part: investors, media professionals, journalists themselves but also the States, and it is very important to have the Prime Minister and Representatives of the Government here.

This is key for the future of the media and journalism but more broadly for the public and for the society as a whole.

The quality of democracy depends also on the quality of the press, on its diversity, on its independence, on the existence of a vibrant media landscape.

For all of these reasons, this conference must help us have courage and boldness in dealing with these issues and challenges and I am very much looking forward to our discussions during this conference.

Thank you.