



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Presence in Albania

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND DIPLOMATS IN ALBANIA

*Remarks by the Head of Presence, Ambassador Florian Raunig, at an event on the 5th anniversary of “Tonight Ilva Tare” TV programme
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Dear Ilva, dear guests,

The invitation I received to say a few words on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the *Tonight Ilva Tare* show might be the side effect of a phenomenon that seems to be unique to the Balkans: The close relationship between media and diplomats.

Where does this relationship come from? What might be its roots? I think primarily this has to do with the way people in the Balkans in general - and in Albania in particular - welcome foreigners. There is a unique culture of welcome towards foreigners; I would say a mixture of respect, correctness, friendship and curiosity.

This open-minded curiosity in turn concentrates not only on the foreigner as such, but even more, on his or her impressions about the host country and its people. Moreover, people are very often curious about the foreigner's assessment of the immediate and long term development of the country in general, and his or her forecast about the future.

“A do të bëhet Shqipëria?” [Will Albania ever be functional?] This was one of the first questions I was asked when I first came to the country in July 1990 as a naïve and inexperienced foreigner, witnessing the first brave attempt of Albanians to overthrow the totalitarian dictatorship. Who was I to answer this question? How could I predict the future of a country I barely knew? What answer could I give?

Being a diplomat in one of the Balkan countries, in particular as an Ambassador or Head of an international mission, media approach your doorstep quite soon after your arrival. The relationship starts: Driven by the same curiosity as the country's inhabitants, the media try to seduce you, to rope you into public life. Suddenly, the diplomat is confronted with a facet of his profession that normally only few have to cope with: public diplomacy. Some diplomats respond to this demand in the classical – let's call it “diplomatic” – way; some accept the challenge to its full extent while others try to balance between these two.

Myself, I was always curious to find out where this curiosity comes from. A convincing explanation I was given might be that this curiosity has three parts: the first is natural curiosity – people are very curious –; the second is the tendency to call for an arbiter in situations of disagreement; and the third is specific to Albania - the long isolation from the outside world during the dictatorial period. But this still does not seem to be enough to explain the phenomenon in depth. To me, it looks like the driving force lies also in the impatient and ardent ambition of Albanians to create a better future.

But one thing is sure: The basis is the open minded, respectful and trustful hospitality of Albanians.

Media have a genuine responsibility in shaping the country's present and future. The manner in which a basically healthy and fresh curiosity is transformed into and satisfied by public information and debate plays a crucial role.

Tonight Ilva Tare show has a part to play in this process. Ilva performs with outstanding professionalism, a good instinct for topics of relevance and she is a hard worker. The guests in her programme are exposed to a disarming combination of fairness and persistence, speed and charm.

Ilva, I wish you and your programme all the best for the next five years!

Thank you.