



Mission to Serbia and Montenegro

ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

IMPROVEMENT OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MEDIA AND POLICE

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ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO - OPERATION IN EUROPE
Mission to Serbia and Montenegro
Media Department/ Law Enforcement Department

Improvement of Communication between Media and Police
Final report of the first phase of the project

1. Organization and aims of the Project

Implementation of the "Improvement of Communication between Media and Police" project that the OSCE Mission to SaM (Media and Law Enforcement Departments) launched in co-operation with the Bureau for Media Co-operation of Serbian Ministry of Interior started in February 2005. This project is a part of overall efforts of the OSCE to assist Serbian authorities to build up stable democratic institutions. It is beyond doubt that both police¹ and media are very important social institutions that have serious influence on the citizens quality of life, establishment of the rule of law principle and functioning of legal system. In that context, partnership relations between the media and police are very important in transforming the police from a regime serving force to citizens protection service.

The processes of political and economic transition in Serbia are followed by safety related issues that society, as a whole, has to combat. This is impossible without certain level of trust in police (as well as in judicial system and other institutions), and it cannot be achieved without two-way efficient co-operation between police and media. Period of autocratic regime in various ways still burdens the relations between media and police, so both have to put a lot of additional effort to bring them to level that would serve both for the best.

Basic aim of this project exactly is, about the importance of mutual cooperation and good relations, to decrease the level of mistrust between them and broaden the knowledge of circumstances and limitations in both professions.

Implementation of the project is envisaged in three phases. The first phase included the assessment of present media and police relations in Serbia, through series of roundtables organized in various regions of the country. At these events the representatives of local and district police and local and regional media assess the level of existing relations, point out problems and suggest possible solutions. In the second phase, recommendations are made on the basis of situation assessment and implemented in order to improve relations between media and police. Third and last phase of the project includes evaluation, supposed corrections of recommended solutions and, if needed, suggestions of some other measures that would make the project self- sustainable.

¹ Term "Police" is used for state authority in charge of public safety and other internal affairs, Ministry of Interior of Republic of Serbia. Relations of BIA (Security Information Agency) and other security services with media are not topic of this report

2. Implementation of the first phase

2.1 Methodology

Within the first phase of project implementation the OSCE Mission to SaM, with support of the Bureau for Media Co-operation of the Serbian Ministry of Interior organized eleven roundtables from February to November 2005. Roundtables were organized in the following Secretariats of Interior: Vranje (roundtable in Bujanovac), Zajecar, Kragujevac, Novi Pazar, Subotica (roundtable in Palic), Nis, Kikinda, Sabac, Pozarevac, Uzice (roundtable in Zlatibor) and Belgrade.² As relevant target groups, the representatives of district police Secretariats, local police officials and representatives of local and regional media that regularly co-operate with the police were invited to take part in roundtable discussions.³ Ms. Gorica Djokic from the Bureau for Media Co-operation represented the Ministry of Interior at all roundtables, and colonel Milos Vojinovic from the Uniformed Police Directorate attended the roundtable in Bujanovac. Representatives of local self-governments (Municipalities, Cities and Districts) also attended the events, as future decentralization of police structure predicts a very important role for local authorities in solving local safety issues. After the first few roundtables it became obvious that, due to lack of understanding of different competence of police, pre-investigative judge and public prosecutor in a criminal procedure, representatives of local or regional judiciary (pre-investigative judges or public prosecutors) should also be present and active in roundtable discussions. Finally, special guests were present at some of the events- Ms. Kimberly Reczek, Media Development Officer from the OSCE Spillover Mission to Skopje (in charge for media and police relation project) attended the roundtable in Zajecar, sharing some of the experiences from similar projects in Macedonia. Representatives of Department for International Development (DFID) within Foreign Office of the UK, engaged in implementation of community policing project in western Serbia were present at the roundtable in Kragujevac. Chief of Operations Center of Montenegro Ministry of Interior, Mr. Bogdan Djurovic attended the roundtable in Zlatibor (as similar project is proposed for Montenegro). Representatives of the OSCE Mission to SaM, from Media and Law Enforcement Departments were also present at all roundtables. In total, 342 participants took part in the roundtable discussions.⁴

² It was not possible to organize a roundtable in each Secretariat in Serbia, so sites with different primary security issues, north and south of the country, border regions and big cities were chosen.

³ Bureau for Media Co-operation of the Serbian Ministry of Interior in each case provided the OMiSaM with list of media with which they co-operate, and the OMiSaM selected the media to be invited, using the criteria of type (print and broadcast), ownership (private, public), coverage (local, regional, correspondents of central media). In multiethnic and multilingual regions (Bujanovac, Novi Pazar, Subotica) ethnic and linguistic criteria were also taken into consideration

⁴ List of all participants is attached to this report as annex 3

<i>Secretariat / date</i>	<i>Police representatives</i>	<i>Media representatives</i>	<i>Judiciary representatives</i>	<i>Local self- government</i>	<i>others</i>	<i>OSCE</i>	<i>total</i>
Bujanovac 03.02.2005.	10	12	/	5	/	10	37
Zajecar 03.03.2005.	11	7	/	6	/	7	31
Kragujevac 23.03.2005.	6	8	/	8	2 DFID	4	28
Novi Pazar 13.04.2005.	6	7	/	6	/	3	22
Subotica 06.05.2005.	10	15	/	3	/	4	31
Nis 31.05.2005.	8	8	1	5		5	27
Kikinda 21.06.2005.	13	10	3	6	/	4	36
Sabac 27.06.2005.	13	12	2	6	/	4	37
Pozarevac 14.07.2005.	7	12	1	4	/	3	27
Uzice 19.07.2005.	12	10	1	7	Representative of Montenegrin MoI	3	34
Beograd 25.10.2005.	14	12	1	2	/	5	32

As a part of preparations for each of the roundtables a questionnaire⁵, designed for purposes of the project has been distributed to invited media outlets. Media representatives were asked to fill out the questionnaire presenting the most important problems they face in communication with police, as well as their suggestions for improvements. Purpose of this pre-investigation was to use time at roundtables rationally and to point discussion to key issues.

The aim of the roundtables was to involve representatives of police, media, judiciary and local authorities into dialogue on most important issues in relations between police and media in general, identification of problems specific for region/ police Secretariat where the event took place, and proposals of possible solutions for some of them.⁶

Roundtable facilitator was Dr. Zelimir Kesetovic, Professor at the Faculty of Civil Defense and Police College in Belgrade.⁷ At the beginning of each roundtable he presented key issues of media and police relations in Serbia.⁸ After that he encouraged roundtable participants to discuss the following topics

- Present communication of local police structures and media
- Accessibility and accuracy of police related information
- Police press releases- how to make them more useful?
- Rights and duties of journalists reporting on police investigations
- Right of police to deny information to media (interests of investigation)
- Mutual support to public awareness campaigns (related to sex-trafficking, drug abuse, traffic safety, holding and use of fire weapons, etc.)
- Possibilities for institutional communication-suggestions (establishment of press office, spokesperson, etc.)
- Possible training for members of police in charge of co-operation with media, possible training for journalists reporting on crime/ police work.

At the end of each of the roundtables the most important problems were summed up, and measures for their overcoming were proposed to participants. Each roundtable was evaluated and reported upon.

2.2 The most important findings (general assessment, Secretariats classification, the most important remarks)

In each of the events, the co-operation between media and police was considered to be much better than during the period of non-democratic regime. However, it is hard to give general and universal assessment on quality of media and police co-operation in Serbia as a whole, as huge differences exist from one Secretariat to another. If we would try to rank Secretariats in which roundtables were organized, according to successful co-operation of media and police, on one end of the scale would be Zajecar, Nis, Pozarevac and Uzice as the most successful ones, while Bujanovac and Novi Pazar would be the unsuccessful ones. The rest of the Secretariats (four of them)

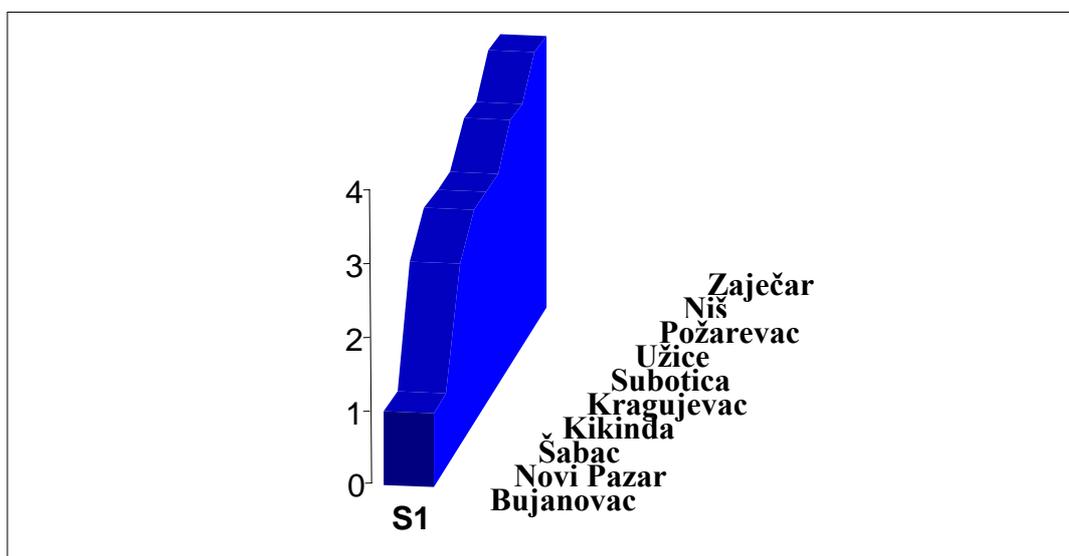
⁵ Questionnaire is attached to this report as annex 1

⁶ Roundtable agenda is attached to this report as annex 2

⁷ Until May 2005 Head of Research and Development Unit at Belgrade Police College

⁸ Presentation is attached to this report as annex 4

would rank in the middle. Due to a number of specifics the Secretariat in Belgrade is hard to compare with other district police units in Serbia. It is interesting that good conditions were often related with personal changes in certain Secretariats (appointment of a new Head of Secretariat), and that the situation is bad in communities where inter-ethnic and other tensions are present. Even in regions where co-operation is good (Uzice, for example), there are serious oscillations.



Fact is that in all roundtables media representatives initiated topics and discussion, while police officials mostly replied to their remarks and suggestions. At some of the events (in Novi Pazar for example) the participants were not ready to talk about problems openly during formal discussion, but rather during breaks. In Kikinda, questionnaire answers were much harsher than criticism and remarks disclosed in the discussion. The overall impression is that the most fruitful discussions were in Subotica and Uzice.

None of the Secretariats has a formally appointed spokesperson (as a specific post with a job description), nor any other official whose exclusive task would be to communicate with the media. On the other hand all of the Secretariats have an official who is in charge of communication with the media. In most of the cases those are the officials employed in the Department for Analysis and Information. Contacts with media are only part of their job description (average around 30% of their work). Often they share the office with officials who perform completely different tasks, and rarely have any technical equipment for their work (PC, audio/ video recorders, Internet access, e-mail account, etc). Usually these are police officers who have no journalistic experience at all,⁹ and who were never trained for that job. In most cases they consult and ask for approval of pre-investigative judges and prosecutors in charge of the case before revealing any information (in order not to jeopardize efficiency of criminal investigation).

⁹ Exception is officer in charge of media co-operation in Kragujevac who has 3 years experience as correspondent of "Vecernje Novosti" daily

Media outlets are being informed daily (via telephone or fax, rarely via e-mail), weekly (through bulletins that police sends to news desks) and monthly. Specific statements are issued in cases of grave criminal acts, fires, etc. Some Secretariats organize regular weekly (Nis) or monthly (Zajecar) press conferences where representatives of all local police stations within Secretariat are present.

When it comes to remarks of media representatives, a number of them are more or less the same in all, or at least in majority of Secretariats, while some are specific for one or few of them. It is interesting that even within the same Secretariat some journalists assessed the co-operation as very good, while some claimed it was insufficient and bad (Subotica)

Remarks of journalists distinctive for all, or for majority of Secretariats

- Information is late and often insufficient, secrecy of data is taken widely, police statements are mostly dry in content, administrative in style and usually consisting of statistics. It seems that police officials do not have a clear picture of what news is and how press releases should be composed.¹⁰ As the police are still relatively closed, journalists are forced to use unofficial sources of information beside official ones.
- Communication goes one-way, from police to media outlets, and is strictly centralized; representatives of local police are not free to provide media with any information before receiving an approval from the Ministry HQ in Belgrade.
- A special problem is that initial information on some criminal act or other safety related incidents are incomplete and procedures for actions of police and journalists regarding information distribution are unclear.
- Procedure to get approval for police officers to be guests in radio and TV shows is undefined, complicated and time consuming, although their presence in the live shows is essential, as "live word" is far more efficient than written statements. Police officers lack basic knowledge on proper media (especially TV) appearance. Approval for broadcast media to video/ audio record police activities or crime scene is rarely given. Communication is mostly reduced to distribution of approved and formal written statements from police, with no possibility for further inquiry.
- There are cases of discrimination of certain media and even censorship of some information. Local media are in worse position to their colleagues from Belgrade based media. In Uzice for example, journalists from small-town media couldn't get the information on case that happened there from local police, while media from Uzice, who communicate directly with Secretariat got the same information promptly. It is very important in some cases, as on-time informing can prevent negative consequences.
- Issue of work of TV reporters and their crews on the crime scene was raised. Both journalists and police officers agreed that some general rules should be set, and education on procedures at crime scene provided for media professionals. It was suggested that journalists and their crews, specialized and trained for covering police work/ crime investigations should get special accreditation that would ease their everyday work.

¹⁰ Journalist in Kikinda roundtable stressed that "events are being described by a person who has no basic journalistic sense for important details" and that the language used is "incomprehensible both to journalists and the public"

- Police are often oversensitive to critique of their work published/broadcast in media
- There is no possibility to communicate with police via e-mail
- Problems in communication are also present in relation with the local judiciary - pre-investigative judges are inaccessible to media representatives, or unready to give information. In some cases certain media are being privileged to get information from investigative court or prosecutor's office.

Remarks of journalists distinctive for specific Secretariats

- Police abandoned practice to hold press conferences, which is a step back comparing to period 2001- 2003 (Bujanovac, Novi Pazar)
- Even widely known facts cannot be officially confirmed. Statistic data on 1964 murders were not given to a journalist writing an analytical article. Audio/ video recordings of police officers statements are rare. (Novi Pazar)
- Officers in charge of media communication are inaccessible after office hours and during weekends (Novi Pazar)
- Sporadic cases of pressure over journalists are present (Novi Pazar)
- Officers, especially Heads of Secretariats and local police chiefs are inaccessible (Kikinda, Subotica)
- Some official requests from journalists are left unanswered (Subotica)
- Police officers do not allow to be audio/ video recorded- communicate only through written statements (Uzice)
- No unified criteria for distribution of information (when a six fold murder was committed on Christmas, none of the police officers could be reached by telephone. On the other hand, when national flag was burnt on Sunday, all the media outlets received a written official statement) (Subotica)
- Police are still closed, not flexible enough and sometimes arrogant. Media that opposed Milosevic's regime still have problems in communication with the police, and officers who described journalists as "traitors" and "foreign mercenaries" during 1990's still hold the same positions within the police. Police officers are afraid to be seen in public with certain "opposition" journalists. In one of the comments a journalist stated: "We have no problem in communication, as we do not have serious communication" (Kikinda)
- Information from Secretariats leak to some journalists due to personal contacts. This puts other media in an inferior position.
- Media are not adequately used in campaigns for traffic safety, against drug abuse, etc. (Subotica)
- Unequal practice in revealing information- for example Belgrade police reveals not only names, but also even photos of suspected criminals, while Secretariat in Sabac provides media only with initials. Even informally police will not reveal names to journalists, which makes them feel "not trustworthy" (Sabac)
- Police are inert and inept in presenting "success stories" that would improve their public image. There are no video footages of rescuing actions, assisting to injured, self-sacrificing acts of police officers etc (Uzice)
- Issuing of new Instruction on Informing by the Minister of Interior in 2004 was a step back in communication between media and police (it is obligatory that

journalists provide police with questions they plan to ask, etc), and meant additional restriction for police officers. (Uzice)

- Few participants initiated a discussion on the need to cleanse the police from people who served the former regime, and on inadequate ethnic composition of police comparing to ethnic composition in nationally mixed regions (Novi Pazar, Subotica). Another point was that officers should speak the most used language in the community (Hungarian in Subotica)
- Some journalists expressed their doubt that any real changes can be conducted on local level before overall strategy is adopted, and systemic solutions are put up and become operative. Strategy should ensure a more open approach and decentralization in police communication with the media. (Uzice)
- Police statements are often useless for the media (for example "a person in a company embezzled certain funds"). Situation is even worse when information is asked from Prosecutor's Office. At the crime scene journalists were forbidden to record anything, while police tolerated people suspected to be involved in the criminal act to use mobile phone cameras. Journalists are not protected while reporting from rallies and other possibly violent events. There is also no protection of journalists from the "nouveaux riches", local tycoons and criminals after publishing stories about them. (Sabac)
- There is no communication between the police and local authorities¹¹ (Novi Pazar)

The most important remarks of police representatives:

- Journalists do not have the knowledge of criminal procedure and police Modus Operandi. Media often give more publicity to irrelevant than to important information about police work. In many cases legal terminology is misused (terms like criminal procedure, investigation, custody, arrest, etc) and the jurisdiction of state authorities (Police, Prosecution, Pre-investigative judiciary and Court of Law) is often mixed in media reports. At some of the roundtables even journalists claimed that "in recent years police learned much more about journalism than journalists learned about police work." Necessity for education and specializing of journalists covering crime and police work was stressed.
- Journalists should take care not to turn their media into a "school for criminals". Sometimes articles/ programs report criminal techniques and police work methodology in full detail.
- There are very few positive stories on police successes, risks and sacrifices police officers take while performing their duties.
- Police officers expressed doubt that certain media outlets and journalists are under influence of local political and financial interests.
- Media should educate citizens and create a new model of reporting that would increase the overall level of safety and responsibility in local communities.
- Police representatives pointed out that they are aware that there is a number of obstacles for better communication with the media, as structure of the police service is very centralized. From their point of view new Instructions for Informing need to be adopted, procedures for communication defined, the system of approvals and distribution of information decentralized, more authority given to

¹¹ The biggest obstacle for better co-operation of police and local authorities in Novi Pazar are political disputes between opposed political parties gathering Bosniaks- SDA and SDP

local police chiefs and type of information that cannot be published defined. New systematization of work posts, foreseeing position of spokesperson in each police Secretariat is being prepared.

- Representatives of prosecution stressed that only the court trial is (usually) open to public, so it is risky to reveal information related to different phases of criminal procedure. Interests of investigation, interests of suspected perpetrator and victim limit the information that can be given to media. Prosecutors support the transparency of state authority's activities, when it does not jeopardize their work, but they also stress personal and biased attitude that journalists have in some cases. Prosecutors believe it is unacceptable that media sometimes report on a case in which prosecution still didn't press charges. Journalists are also usually very interested for the charges, but rarely follow court procedure till the verdict. If charges are dropped media rarely report on that and person who was suspected and presented as suspect in the public inevitably loses good reputation.

Examples of existing good practice

- Proactive and helpful attitude of traffic police and firefighters towards media and joint work on awareness campaigns were stressed as the most positive examples of communication. Cooperation with Ministry's Bureau for Media Co-operation was also highly graded.¹²
- Community policing program that is being implemented in Pozega (western Serbia, Secretariat in Uzice) pays special attention to media and police relations. Two campaigns were conducted in co-operation of local police and local media- first one dedicated to traffic safety and second one on the phenomenon of domestic violence. Campaigns resulted with rapid decrease in number of traffic accidents, and more cases of domestic violence were reported to police. Citizens were given a chance to get answers from police to a thousand questions they submitted through the local radio and TV station. A specialized TV show on police work and safety issues is produced and aired biweekly at the local TV station, and public helped the police to solve some cases after they were presented in that show. (Uzice)
- The Secretariat publishes an internal magazine that is distributed to citizens free of charge (Nis)
- Local and regional TV stations produce a show on crime/ police work (Kragujevac, Sabac)
- There are no taboos- police is open for topics such as overuse of force, violation of authority, corruption and help to media to get some information or footage (police organized a media visit to flooded villages in Nis region). Certain campaigns (traffic safety, juvenile crime, and drug abuse) are conducted in co-operation with the Secretariat and media outlets. (Nis)
- Police produce audio and video material for distribution to broadcast media, or takes TV crew to certain actions (activities of river police against smugglers and illegal net-fishing on the Danube river) (Pozarevac)
- Police officers are present in programs of local radio and TV stations, discussing local safety issues with journalists and viewers/ listeners. Secretariat prints and

¹² Those estimations, given during Belgrade roundtable are significant, as most media outlets are published/ produced there. MOI headquarters are in the capital, and Belgrade Secretariat is by far the biggest Secretariat within Serbian MOI.

distributes leaflets, informing public on certain actions (rights and obligations of police officers, how to appeal against a police officer in cases of violation of authority or corruption, traffic safety, misuse of guns during celebrations etc). Police provide the media with "bad news" on their work-misuse of power and misdemeanors of police officers. Meetings with journalists are occasionally organized in police stations to discuss police activities and mutual co-operation. Journalists are allowed to check living conditions in prison cells and to go on patrols with police officers. (Zajecar)

Importance of constant dialogue between the media and police was highlighted in conclusions of all roundtables. Periodical meetings would contribute to solving of majority of misunderstandings between the media and police, not waiting for "global" solutions. It would also influence the increase of mutual trust, respect and awareness of advantages of efficient communication.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

Organization of roundtables in Secretariats of Internal Affairs throughout Serbia proved to be a very useful project. In spite of limited obstacles and unreadiness of participants for open dialogue at some of the events, the most important problems can be identified and solutions for improvement of communication between the media and police proposed on the basis of this insight.

Although relations of media and police are much better than during 1990's, they are still far from wanted standards applied in a democratic society. Mistrust is still present; the police are not sufficiently open and still in need of a strategy for their public relations and media policy. The present situation is marked by legacies from the past, including insufficient awareness of the necessity for co-operation and true partnership. Unevenness in the process of reform of the Ministry of Interior influences the lack of systemic solutions that would help improvement of communication between media and police and other linked projects (community policing etc). This is best reflected in the centralized model of police structure, absence of local and regional influence on police and safety related issues, bureaucratic procedures and low capacity of ordinary police officers and local police chiefs in the decision making process, partially caused by an overly hierarchical system inherited from the previous times. It seems that media and police are still seen more as rivals or even enemies than partners in protecting the community and its democratic values. This certainly is a consequence of the overall situation in the Serbian society, slow pace of transition and building of new institutions. Getting to know each other better is the main precondition for improvement of co-operation between media and police in the future.

Main problems in this field are:

- Non-existing strategy of police relation with media,
- Disorder and undefined procedures,
- Authority and responsibility of police officers on local and regional level,
- Disorganization of unit for communication with the media,
- Lack of technical equipment,
- Imprecise regulations on secrecy of data,
- Irresponsibility for public word,
- Lack of educated journalists/ editors covering police work

- Lack of police officers informed about the essence, character and aims of media

Overall systemic solution for better communication between media and police can only be achieved after the adoption of a new Constitution and set of systemic Laws (on the police, criminal code etc). However, in the near future it is possible to create significant improvements. To improve relations between media and police the following is suggested:

- Compilation of the Strategy of Ministry of Interior of Republic of Serbia for relations with the media, formulating concrete media policy upon this Strategy. Public promotion of both Strategy and policy¹³
- Compilation of Guidelines/ Instructions for media relations that will clearly define to authorities how to reveal information, criteria for withholding information, relevant rules and clear procedures of communication between media and police, foreseeing the need for decentralization that will contribute to faster information flow. It is also necessary for police to be more proactive, organize press conferences more frequently, to have less formalism, to produce faster and more complete public statements, ensure easier access to police chiefs, implementing the same practice in all Secretariats and to equally treat all media outlets.¹⁴
- Structuring of media relations service in district police units countrywide (posting a spokesperson in each Secretariat) and their equipping. Giving authority to police officers on local level to provide media with initial information.
- Tailoring suitable education programs for police officers, police chiefs and media representatives.
- Spreading of best practices nationwide
- Putting additional effort in joint work of police and media outlets on citizens education and increasing awareness and building a system of values regarding safety.
- Organizing various joint PR campaigns
- Organizing regional events to exchange experiences (if possible even wider than regional).

Dr. Zelimir Kesetovic
Belgrade, 1 November 2005

¹³ As that is a political issue, compilation of Strategy is under authority of Cabinet of Minister of Interior of Republic of Serbia. Other proposed measures will be, in the next phase of the project, developed into proposals that will be submitted to Ministry for approval.

¹⁴ After roundtable in Belgrade Ministry's Bureau for Media Co-operation drafted that Guidelines and submitted them to the OSCE Mission to SaM, media outlets and police Secretariat. Initial feedback is very positive.