



Dimitrios Kypreos, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, talks to Danas

SERBIA'S MEDIA IS NOT LIKE IN MILOSEVIC'S TIMES

The Serbian Government has announced that the media strategy will be published in the first half of this year, but honestly, the basic thing is not if this important document comes out today or tomorrow, what matters is its contents, says Dimitrios Kypreos, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia in his interview with daily Danas.

He explains that the OSCE Mission to Serbia, as well as himself personally, called on the Ministry of Culture and the Government to include the journalists' associations to participate in the public debate.

We would like the debate to be as broad as possible. For this reason, I think that journalists' associations, and journalists themselves, should participate in the discussion and that the media strategy will take into consideration all of these opinions during the debate. - emphasised Kypreos.

Q: What do you think of the media scene in Serbia? How regulated is it compared to the period before the 5th of October 2000, as the prevailing opinion is that it is worse than during Milosevic?

A: The situation cannot be compared to the one ten years ago. There is much progress since then. But still, there are problems. The good thing is that a number of problems are the result of modernization: this doesn't mean that they are not serious, complex problems, or that they have quick solutions.

Q: The assessment of journalist associations, and journalists, is that the biggest problem for journalists in Serbia is that in local communities, it isn't possible to freely work as a journalist, because of the economic pressure. How can this problem be solved and strengthen local media?

A: If local governments have budgets for this purpose and they have the possibility to maintain municipal media, then they should respect an independent editorial policy. We need to be realistic. The trend today is towards globalisation and local media need financial help to stay on the market. It is obvious that big media are taking over. Local TV stations are a bigger problem than municipal radio stations, because they are more costly.

Q: Journalists' associations are talking about political, economic and institutional pressures of politicians towards those media whose writing and reporting are not to their liking. How can this be stopped and how can we "distance" politicians and political parties from the media?

A: The main problem is the need to check the credibility of the information. If the information is correct, then this protects journalism and journalists. There is worldwide a sort of cleavage between multiple interests on one side and journalists on the other. This sets journalists in a constant state of alert. Maybe I'll be a bit unpleasant, if I say that in the end everything falls on journalists' shoulders. Because they have the responsibility, they have to guarantee the validity and accuracy of their information. Journalists have to demonstrate resistance and to stay faithful to journalistic principles, above all the truthfulness of information despite any pressure.

Q: We are witness to frequent violations of the journalistic code of ethics in the media. What should be done to create a more decent media scene?

A: Journalists would have to respect the codes they brought in themselves. The best is when media professionals themselves agree on where the border of professional reporting is. But once they agree on this they have to stick to it.

Q: On the other hand, institutions frequently give information to the media in the preelection period to win over their loyalty. What do you think about this problem?

A: Here is where a legal framework is important. For example: a good law on the financing of political parties is very important when it comes to this. I am aware that the process of adoption of such a legislation is on the way. This would be very positive and important for Serbia. This kind of law would help both parties and journalists to work in a transparent environment.

Q: To what extent are the media in Europe and Serbia, truly free?

A: The media in Serbia face the same problems as elsewhere in the world. They operate in an environment affected by the economic crisis, there is need of further modernisation as well as of an appropriate legal framework. I am optimistic, because I see a dynamic of modernisation in the media sector in Serbia and because Serbian journalists are fighters. This optimism is strengthened by cases such as the daily Danas, a pillar in that course.

Q: How to protect journalists, as we saw what happened to Slavko Curuvija, Dada Vujasinovic and Milan Pantic because of their reporting?

A: The OSCE Mission constantly follows the developments in the media scene and intervenes if and when there is need. My visit today at Danas is a proof of this, as many other actions we have undertaken as a Mission or together with other representatives of the International Community. Last but not least let me remind your readers that the OSCE Mission granted its "Person of the Year" 2010 Award to an investigative journalist that has come under serious threats. Of course the authorities have to continue their efforts so that an atmosphere of security for the journalists is maintained.

Danas, 15 April, 2011 http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/srpski mediji nisu isti kao u vreme milosevic a.55.html?news id=213742