



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

Address by Ambassador Osmo Lipponen, Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania,
at the opening of the roundtable on Current Albanian Media Issues

Hotel Rogner Europapark, Tirana, Albania
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Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to welcome you all to this roundtable on behalf of the OSCE Presence in Albania. We work actively towards developing further the Albanian media institutions and legislation, harmonizing the local media standards with the European ones, strengthening the independent media and media institutions, cultivating responsible media freedom and supporting good journalistic practice.

In order to achieve these overall objectives, the Presence keeps an open dialogue with relevant Albanian institutions. It also co-operates closely with international institutions in providing expertise on media issues.

We believe that the media can contribute significantly towards positive changes in Albania, and on a number of occasions the media have indeed played a constructive role. It is encouraging to see that the electronic media are investing professional capacities in producing new Albanian programming, that the owners are investing considerably in technology, and that the respect for the copyright law has increased significantly.

But despite these developments, Albanian media still have a lot of room for improvement. Among the topics of this roundtable, we see a wide range of issues that Albanian media are facing at present.

Allow me to touch upon a couple of these points:

First, the issue of transparency. The Albanian society needs an increased transparency. In case of the media, the ownership structures of the media companies need to be clear.

The editorial policy should not be dictated only by narrow interests of the owners, the politicians they support or the big advertisers. The newsrooms need more independence from the owners' business deals with the politicians in exchange for protection, tenders with public funds or fat advertising contracts. The media are the fourth power.

Journalism is a dignified and responsible profession. Unfortunately, many journalists still work in the black market, without rights granted by the Albanian Labor Code.

The Albanian public has voiced its opinion on what is happening with the media today. I was told that the newspaper circulation figures have dropped drastically and that people are very skeptical towards the truth as presented by the media. The media are in the business of credibility and if the credibility is lost journalism stops being a business and turns itself into a weapon.

Recently, you have been discussing several issues in relation to media legislation and in particular the draft print media law. We are following closely how this draft law is being prepared and will give our comments upon the finalization of the draft.

The defamation legislation needs to be decriminalized. The 2000 London Declaration on Current Challenges to Media Freedom stated that the repeal of criminal defamation laws in favour of civil laws should be considered, in accordance with relevant international standards. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media said in 2002 that no special protection should be afforded to public officials who should exercise a greater level of tolerance toward criticism than ordinary citizens. He added that no journalist should be sentenced to prison for what he or she writes, and in a democracy, writing about the activities of public servants is part of a journalist's professional duties.

We support all the initiatives to protect the freedom of expression in the legislation, but also self-regulating initiatives from the media community itself. The media workers need to bring more professionalism, independence and accountability into their work. At the moment, self-regulation mechanisms in Albania are still in a very initial phase. The code of ethics needs to be reviewed. The media need to realize that freedom comes along with responsibility and if this dichotomy is not symmetric the media cannot blame it all on the others.

The OSCE Presence, in co-operation with its partner organizations, will continue to offer its assistance and expertise to the Albanian media and relevant media institutions whenever needed and will continue to promote freedom of expression, accompanied by accountability.