



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

**HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT 5th ANNUAL
MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FORUM**

1 November 2019

I would like to open this forum, our fifth forum, expressing our keen interest in the situation of the media in Albania, to which we have provided support throughout the years according to our mandate.

It is with satisfaction that I see this Forum eliciting not only local, but also regional interest, five years after the OSCE Presence had initiated it.

This interest tells me two things. First, a lot more needs to be done to improve the media situation here in Albania. And second, there is space for co-operation and dialogue.

So, I am confident we are on the right track. I know you will be sharing success stories, and of course, most of all, the problems.

Since its opening here in the country, the OSCE Presence has embarked together with all of you on an effort to:

- align media regulation to international standards;
- to improve the status of journalists, and I acknowledge there's a long way still to go;
- to improve the quality of reporting,
- to support the public broadcaster to be more independent and also more professional, while switching from analogue to digital broadcast.

Since we initiated this Forum five years ago, we witnessed progress but also setbacks.

- We have been noticing significant improvements in RTSH's activity. We believe that a real democracy needs strong public service media. As recommended by the ODIHR report, legislation should further help public service media to preserve its independence.
- Media outlets are increasingly performing on a free market, the most professional ones aiming to provide unbiased information to their audiences.
- There is an increased awareness of the importance of decriminalizing media offences, taking them out of the Penal Code. This is what we want and we will continue to urge for a decriminalisation.
- The online media has developed vigorously, as in all other European countries.
- The number of media outlets has increased compared to the past, and this is, first of all, a sign of natural growth and development.

- I would like to commend here the EU-funded project *Media in Focus*, which supports RTSH and the Journalism Department of Tirana University, marking a step forward in the development of the public broadcaster.

Despite the progress, there are issues still to be addressed:

- First of all, the concentration of media ownership is preventing diversity and hampering professionalism. ODIHR underlined in its recommendations after the 2019 elections that the concentration of media ownership should be limited by law. We invited an expert today to inform about some recommendations on how to address this problem as part of the on-going implementation of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.
- Some websites use biased information to attack public figures unethically, without any concern for journalistic standards.
 - To make this matter worse, the ownership of some of these websites is not clear, making their activity even less transparent and less professional.
- We cannot pretend we do not remember several dark moments when journalists were harassed or physically attacked.
 - Fortunately, not by the Government, as in other countries.
 - But we do follow closely all these cases, constantly in contact with the journalists and the media, while also communicating with the investigators to see these cases resolved.
- Equally, we do not want to hide our concerns about the changes to the Media Law proposed by the Government last December:
 - about this subject I will invite my colleague from the Representative on Freedom of Media to talk more, as he is present here with us today;
 - but we do want to underline our full support for all independent and professional online media activity;
 - and also ask the Albanian lawmakers once the draft law is done to guarantee an open and transparent debate of all proposed changes with all interested and concerned parties;
 - we also encourage the Albanian lawmakers to respond to the letter recently signed by 11 media outlets as a sign of transparency and inclusiveness.
- Last but not least, we encourage you, journalists and media outlets, to make your voices heard and actually take concrete steps on your own to address the media recommendations section in all the ODIHR reports of recent years.
 - One of the long-standing recommendations, which has never been addressed is that the ready-made tapes practice by the parties has to end as it is antithetical to professional journalism, while the media itself has to do a more thorough job in electoral coverage and reporting. This is not only an issue of legislation;

this is also an issue and task for the journalists to act to that. It is not only the government that has to respond, but media themselves can also take action.

In concluding, I would like to thank the members of the Media Partners Group, the European Broadcasting Union, the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, ODIHR, and also the Swiss-funded PACEP Project for their respective contribution to this event.

I look forward to productive discussions that would lead to tangible media actions to improve their situation here and in the region.

Thank you for your attention!