



Media Task Force
Progress Report
Working Table I Meeting
Belgrade, 29 May 2006

Introduction

The goal of the Media Task Force (MTF) is to assist the development of independent and professional media throughout South Eastern Europe (SEE). In order to achieve this objective MTF is playing the role of a catalyst, forging cooperation between donors, international organizations and SEE recipients.

The work strategy of the MTF has proven to be a great success. Bringing together local organizations and media professionals in our Media Working Groups in eight SEE countries, partners produced important results. The Media Working Groups and MTF developed a joint strategy for media support and singled out media legislation, television production and local media associations as priorities.

MTF continues to cooperate with Ministries of Foreign Affairs of SEE countries with a view of targeting priorities and coordinating action plans. Its cooperation with the European Commission, the Council of Europe as well as various international NGO's in the field of media development continues to be fruitful.

The regional and national comprehensive strategy for media development in South Eastern Europe, developed in November 2004, bears fruits. Legislation is in place, the market is developing, quality production is expanding and training has improved the skills of journalists.

Activities

The Media Task Force is focusing its work on three groups of activities: the first is directed towards increased regional ownership and sustainability, the second towards self-regulation and finally the MTF is engaged in the evaluation of assistance activities.

As far as self-regulation is concerned, the MTF supported conferences in the region: Sofia, Kosovo and Sarajevo. The general outcome of these encounters has been positive leading to increased activities in this area. Most important examples are the establishment of self-regulatory body in Bulgaria, further development of a Press Council in Sarajevo and establishment of a Press Council in Kosovo. Other SEE countries, such as Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, are directing their activities towards the attainment of this goal.

In the area of sustainability the MTF supported conferences in Amsterdam and Zagreb. The outcome of these events is a commitment to a more focused approach, in which five main donors agreed to cooperate and work together with the media centers in the region with a goal of rendering them sustainable and able to develop independently,



with a view of creating more market oriented and increasingly professional organizations.

Concerning the donor-evaluation related activities the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Norway and Germany as well as SIDA (Sweden) agreed to sponsor a major assessment of ten years of media assistance to the Balkans. This research will be carried out under the auspices of the Media Task Force. The research will produce a thorough evaluation of the impact of the financial and political support to the region, as well as it will publish a substantial list of lessons learned and hints for implementation of media assistance elsewhere in the World.

The MTF continues to cooperate with SEE MFA's on the implementation of specific recommendations directed towards the assessment of possible future strategies for the development and support in the field of media.

The MTF is gradually seizing the activities directed at the production of the monthly reports on media legislation, issuing of statements by the media working groups as well as the direct involvement with project funding, and is working on the gradual transfer of these activities to the regional actors.

Results

Thanks to the overall MTF involvement and the interventions of the executive secretary, particularly in the field of arranging financial assistance for relevant projects of local partners, SEE media legislation is brought closer in line with European standards. The preparation of the news broadcast law in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a good example of the successful MTF involvement.

The amount of support available for producing quality television programmes has significantly increased due to the involvement of the Media Task Force. These programmes address corruption, reconciliation, youth culture, social issues and the consequences for those that were separated by the war. In 2005, many programmes that received support through the MTF were finished and aired. Six episodes on Women in Trafficking were produced and the 12-part series called *Videoletters* was broadcasted simultaneously on seven public broadcasters all over the Region from April until June 2005 and rebroadcasted in the months afterwards.

In addition, the MTF has supported the cross-border exchange of television programmes, to increase available information and mutual understanding. In addition, close cooperation with the EC to increase the support for TV productions resulted in the launch of the Call for Proposals to support regional co-productions of documentaries and television programmes of social relevance.

The overview of media support indicates that aid is increasingly provided to local organizations with a good record of accomplishment – partly the result of the Media Task Force's intermediary work. Genuine sustainability remains difficult to achieve in the short term. In the future, a greater emphasis should be placed on lowering structural costs (property, rent) and increasing domestic contributions / membership fees. Donors need to enter a final agreement with key-organizations as an exit strategy.



Future Challenges

Ensuring self-sustainability of responsible media outlets, training centres and watchdog organizations may require more time, yet international support is gradually diminishing.

The implementation of media legislation and regulation in line with European standards continues to require attention - in particular through monitoring and technical assistance.

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