



Media Task Force

Working Table I Meeting Prague, 15 November, 2005

Introduction

By forging cooperation between donors, international organizations and recipients, the Media Task Force (MTF) assists the development of independent and professional media throughout SEE.

Cooperation with local organizations with a proven track record is crucial in the work of the Media Task Force. Under its auspices, media professionals work together in Media Working Groups in eight countries, providing feedback on priorities for media development. Together with these groups, the MTF developed a strategy for media support and singled out media legislation, television production and local media associations as priorities.

A comprehensive strategy for media development in South Eastern Europe has been developed, both regionally and nationally, and was adopted in November 2004.

The Media Task Force works with Ministries of Foreign Affairs to determine priorities and coordinate action plans, cooperates with the European Commission and works closely with the Council of Europe as well as various international NGO's in the field of media development.

Activities

The Media Working Groups issued statements on media developments, monitored the implementation of media legislation and provided comments on projects to do with assistance. The reports are distributed to an interested group of professionals working on media development in South Eastern Europe (within international organizations, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and members of the Stability Pact). Additionally, the Media Task Force produces a *monthly update on media legislation* in SEE.

In cooperation with the Media Working Groups, the executive secretary discussed the need for media reform, particularly legislation and regulation, with local authorities and international organizations involved. The visits of the Special Coordinator and those of the Secretariat to the Region were used to raise issues of concern.

The MTF helped to coordinate support and advised donors on their media assistance. In particular, the executive secretary discussed future strategies for media support with several member countries / MFA's during visits and working meetings.



In the past months, much emphasis has been placed on issues such as sustainability and exit strategies. The MTF has prepared specific recommendations to this effect and works together with MFA's to implement these.

Results

Through its involvement, particularly in arranging funding for relevant projects of local partners and the interventions of the executive secretary, media legislation is brought closer in line with European standards. The preparation of the news broadcast law in Macedonia is a case in point. Training officials and raising awareness are improving the implementation of "Access to Information" in five of the countries. The programme of the Council of Europe, implemented in the framework of the Stability Pact, addresses the (implementation of) broadcast legislation in most countries, in particular by providing expertise. Conferences were organized on important topics, such as regulatory bodies, ethics in newspaper business, self-regulation of the media, access to information, media in times of crisis and media ownership concentration. The issue of libel legislation has been the focus of much work by the Media Working Groups. Together with the Council of Europe and the European Commission, a high level seminar on public broadcasting was held in June.

The amount of support available for producing quality television programmes has significantly increased due to the involvement of the Media Task Force. The 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 went on air and the 12-part series called *Videoletters* was broadcast simultaneously on seven public broadcasters all over the Region from April until June 2005.

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. However, genuine sustainability is still difficult. 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.



Evaluation

The Media Task Force assistance has targeted support to the media, in particular in certain areas (legislation, production and association building). Concretely, this resulted in various laws that have been adopted or amended, work on improved legislation and many productions of high quality television, which reached a large audience and had a significant impact. As said, the media institutions are not sustainable and work in this field is hampered by the limitations of the media market itself: media outlets do not have sufficient funds or will to support advocacy centres or pay for the training of their own staff.

Challenges

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

The adoption and implementation of media legislation and regulation in line with European standards is a process, which requires readiness from domestic authorities, as well as international support and expertise.

Providing a sound legal framework for the media needs to remain on the agenda, together with associations to monitor the implementation, self-regulation to watch the quality of the media and support for production of socially relevant material.