



Working Table I Meeting
Sofia, 17 May 2005

PROGRESS REPORT

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 nine countries, providing feedback on priorities and projects. 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 in the next three years 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 on regional CARDS assistance to the media, and works closely with the Council of Europe as well as various international NGOs in the field of media development.

Activities

The Media Working Groups issued statements on media developments, provided reports to the Executive Secretary and gave comments on projects to do with assistance. The reports are distributed to a relevant group of professionals working 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 / MFAs.

In the past months, much emphasis has been placed on issues such as regional ownership, sustainability and exit strategies. The MTF has prepared specific recommendations in this respect and works together with MFAs to implement these.

Results

Through the Media Task Force involvement, particularly in arranging funding for relevant projects of local partners and through the interventions of the Executive Secretary, media legislation is brought closer in line with European standards. Awareness raising and the training of officials are improving the implementation of "Access to Information" in five 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, access to information, broadcast legislation and media ownership concentration. The issue of libel legislation has been the focus of much work done by the Media Working groups. A high level seminar on public broadcasting, organised with the Council of Europe and the European Commission, will be held in June 2005.

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 programs that received support through the MTF were finished and aired. Six episodes on Women in Trafficking were aired and the 12-episodes series called Videoletters was broadcasted simultaneously on seven public broadcasters all over the region. The Videoletters Premiere in the region was held on 2 April 2005 in Sarajevo.

In addition, the MTF has supported the cross-border exchange of television programmes, to increase available information and mutual understanding. In addition, a closer cooperation with the EC to increase the support for TV productions under the CARDS regional programme would be welcomed.

The overview of assistance in the media sector indicates that aid is increasingly provided to local organizations with a good record of accomplishment – partly the result of the Media Task Force' 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 into 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 area (legislation, production and association capacity-building). Concretely, this resulted in various laws that have been adopted or amended, work on improved legislation and many productions of high quality television. 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 expertise and support.

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, support for production of socially relevant material and training for journalists.

WT I YL 02/05/2005