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Security Sector Reform and the Media

Regional Conference on Defence and the Freedom of Information

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On November 14 and 15, a regional conference on "Security Sector Reform and the Media" took place in Belgrade, bringing together some 40 participants from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, (Former Yugoslav) Republic of Macedonia as well as Serbia and Montenegro. The conference, organized by the two Swiss-based organisations Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and medienhilfe together with two local organisations, was opened by the Minister of Defence of Serbia and Montenegro, Mr. Boris Tadic, and by the Ambassador of Switzerland to Serbia and Montenegro, Mr. Gaudenz Ruf. During two days, the representatives of the Security Sector (ministries of defence, police etc.) and of the media discussed the challenges of the information age for the culture of communication and the possibilities for better mutual respond to the needs of each side.

The complexity of both systems, the media as well as the security sector, and the fast technological and social changes were an issue, but also the lack of knowledge and understanding for the professional needs and working conditions of the respective other sector. The conference allowed creating mutual understanding and therewith a step towards trust between the two sectors so crucial for the democratisation of the political systems and the societies.

As key challenges and needs for further improvement, the following issues were identified:

- Lacking or weak legal ground (Freedom of Information Law etc.) and the implementation/enforcement of existing laws
- Education and professionalism (knowledge about the security sector, investigative journalism, spokesperson at the ministries etc.)
- Capacity building and structural reforms (Information management, financial possibilities for research and investigation, publication and communication)
- Bridges (Interaction and communication between the media system and the security sector)

The list of participants, the detailed agenda as well as the working documents of the conference are available at the website of medienhilfe: www.medienhilfe.ch.

For further information and documentation (pictures etc.), please address to Mr. Roland Brunner, exec.dir. medienhilfe and participant at the conference: rbr@medienhilfe.ch or by phone +41/1/272 46 37