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# **Coalition building for democratic reforms**

## **Media and their potential contribution to enhanced security**

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Paper prepared for presentation at the Conference

## **Security Sector Reform and the Media**

### **Regional Conference on defence and the freedom of information**

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The challenges for human security in South Eastern Europe or the Western Balkans are well known, listed and analysed many times in a broad range of publications, among others in books published by the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces DCAF and its partners.<sup>1</sup> Just to list the most important points once more:

- Ongoing border conflicts and territorial disputes (ethnic nationalism)
- Organized crime, trafficking of drugs, arms, humans across borders
- Corruption and nepotism in economy and in the political system
- Political, and institutional reforms towards democratic legitimacy and bureaucratic professionalism (institution and capacity building)
- Economic reform and development (income generating activities)
- Cohesion of state and society based on multiethnic citizenship
- Reform and transformation of armed forces with democratic civil control
- Full protection, participation and integration of minorities and ethnic communities without cultural assimilation, respect for human rights
- The right to free decision for refugees and IDPs about return to the previous living place or integration in the new setting
- Free, independent and professional media out of state and political control
- Education for a new generation (preserve traditions, but overcome traditionalism)
- Truth and reconciliation on all levels
- Comprehensive regional security policy and co-operation based on human security
- Fighting global terrorism and its local basis
- European (re-)integration (EU membership)

As Vaclav Havel said: The nation is secure only when the people of the nation feel secure. Unfortunately, citizens in most countries in South Eastern Europe are far away from this feeling of security.

While all these challenges are well known, the way to get things moving forward is all too often like a twining mountain road. While local players often confront instead to co-operate, the same is true unfortunately for the international community, all too often still desperately lacking a comprehensive strategy, unified structures and a common policy.

One thing is for sure: To face the challenges and to move the countries in the region forward, their own efforts and investments are a basic prerequisite. Without the clear commitment of the state actors and civil societies, there is nothing the international community can base its support on.

And another point seems obvious: The countries will not move forward against each other or competing about the pull-position, but only when co-operating in all fields needed: economic exchange, political co-operation, social contacts and first of all: regional stability and security. The security sector reform is the most obvious proof for this statement: How shall one of these countries enter a coalition as Nato to co-operate on global security, as long as some of political

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leaders are not able or willing to grant security to each other, but still perceive the neighbour as a (potential) enemy?

The processes of reforms got stuck in most of the countries for many reasons. One crucial mistake was and still is done by the international community. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, a big and fast change was announced by the self-proclaimed winners of the Cold War: Free market economy and democracy within years, if not months... Most of the reforms executed in the countries of the former Eastern and South Eastern Europe were based on western ideologies and implemented by so-called experts. At least in the Balkans, reforms were hardly ever based on local potentials, local players and local know-how. To make the point clear: International support was and is needed, but it can not substitute the local experience and expertise.

To face the challenges and move the region forward, a coalition of the able and willing is needed. This coalition has to include all political forces and organisations of civil society in the respective country, in the whole region and on international scale that are striving to overcome the legacies of the past and to face the new challenges in a democratic spirit. Only based on a broad consensus for transition and the measures needed, the deadlock of nepotism and nationalism can get overcome and a culture of cooperative security can be developed.

Ambassador Gerard Stoudmann, OSCE Office of Democracy Institutions and Human Rights ODIHR, stated: "The population must identify itself with the system, feel empowered, and develop a sense of ownership of the democratic structures established."<sup>ii</sup>

Only if the citizens become stakeholders of the reforms, the antidemocratic forces can be overcome. Civic empowerment is a crucial step in the coalition for change.

Independent media are a part of and a platform for this coalition. They are a key prerequisite and an operational tool for the coalition to be established and sustained, as free, professional media

- Provide the space for the society and the politics to assess the situation and the challenges
- Provide the forum to discuss visions, options, concrete measures
- Keep the public informed about progress and failures
- Allow the public to keep the elected politicians accountable

Media can be the link between well informed citizens and accountable politicians, strengthening both sides by providing factual and professional information and by providing the forum for public debates. To have the media being capable to fulfil this demanding challenge, a high level of commitment, social responsibility and professionalism is needed. Especially when dealing with

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sensitive issues as public and human security, the checks and balances need a lot of professional know-how.

The handbook for Parliamentarians states: "The basic problem is that parliaments mainly rely on information emerging from the government and military, yet these are the institutions they are supposed to oversee."<sup>iii</sup>

For the democratic control of armed forces and the reform of the security sector, public awareness is needed more than anywhere else. To have a public aware of its security sector, public debates are needed. To provoke public debates, the security sector has to be investigated and held accountable, in short: it has to be challenged – as much as any other institution. Media should be the tool and platform for this public debate.

The security sector is definitely the most demanding part of media engagement, as journalists dealing with the security sector

- need a deep understanding and insight into the matter for professional reporting
- are confronted with closed state and defence systems, usually not all too willing to provide information, while on the other hand laws on free access to information in most countries in the region don't exist
- deal with illegal activities as smuggling of drugs, arms, humans
- risk with every investigative story to confront power holders and elites
- need independent media to publish the story against all political pressures

Representatives of the media and of the state security sector are not supposed to be friends. They will always have divergent interests and media will hopefully always challenge the state and security structures. But this confrontation shall be a professional one, based on understanding of the mission and mandate, the functioning and the challenges the security sector faces. Understanding brings confidence between the two sides. And there is one common interest between the media and the security sector: public accountability and thereby democratic legitimization of state activities.

As UNESCO Director General Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, worded it facing the limitations of media freedom after September 11: "There is an undoubted tension between the exercise of basic freedoms and the need for greater security in the face of terrorism, but the whole point of any anti-terrorist campaign must be the security of our freedoms."<sup>iv</sup>

Or as UN Secretary General Kofi Annan puts it: "The danger is that in pursuit of security, we end up sacrificing crucial liberties, thereby weakening our common security, not strengthening it – and thereby corroding the vessels of democratic government from within."<sup>v</sup>

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Professional, independent media with investigative profile keeping aware of the thin border line between sustaining freedom and limiting liberties it in the name of defending freedom. Media provide the elected bodies the information they need to execute their constitutional mandate to control the security sector and to monitor the "vessels of democratic government". And they provide the citizens the information to hold the politicians accountable in this function.

To have the chance to discuss the relations between the media sector and representatives of the armed forces in this distinguished conference provides us a great opportunity.

If this conference achieves its goal to make us think about interests on both sides, about the informal and institutional relations between the media and the security sector and about ways to improve their cohabitation in the best interest of the society, we will do a big step together.

medienhilfe is grateful to all those that made this conference possible, be it as donor, as partner or as participant.

In spring this year, DCAF and medienhilfe co-organized a similar conference with a stronger local approach in Skopje. In co-operation with our local partner organizations in Serbia & Montenegro, the Center for Civil-Military Relations and the Belgrade Media Center, we are glad to make this conference possible. Special thanks go to Mr. Tadic and the Ministry of Defence, that not only warmly welcomed and honours this conference with his presence, but also provided us the venue and logistics.

I am looking forward a fruitful exchange, striving together towards the coalition of the able and willing for a democratically legitimized culture and policy of cooperative security. I wish us all an exiting, challenging and constructive debate.

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<sup>i</sup> Looking ahead: Security Challenges in the Balkans through 2010. Istvan Gyarmati / Theodor Winkler (ed.), Belgrade 2002

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid*, p. 206

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid*. p. 78

<sup>iv</sup> The world of parliaments, Issue No. 6, May 2002; quoted in: Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector. Principles, mechanisms and practices. Handbook for Parliamentarians No. 5, Geneva/Belgrade 2003, p. 40.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid* p. 107

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