



**NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**



Council of Europe Project
Promoting freedom of expression and information and freedom of the media in South-East Europe
Voluntary Contribution of Norway

Conclusions

South-East Europe Regional Conference The role and importance of the PBS in building a democratic society

26-27 May 2014

Hotel Europe, Sarajevo

The Council of Europe, in the framework of the Project “Promoting freedom of expression and information and freedom of the media in South-East Europe (SEE)” has organised a Regional conference “The role and importance of the Public Broadcasting Service in building a democratic society”, on 26-27 May 2014, in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Freedom of expression and the right to seek and receive information are fundamental for the functioning of a genuine democracy. As stated in the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers’ Declaration on public service media governance, adopted in 2012, media are the most important tool for freedom of expression in the public sphere, enabling people to exercise the right to seek and receive information. Public service media play a specific role with regard to the respect of this right and the provision of a varied and high-quality content, contributing to the reinforcement of democracy and social cohesion, and promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Public service media need to operate and evolve within a sustainable governance framework which secures both the necessary editorial independence and public accountability. In the above-mentioned declaration, the Committee of Ministers alerts to the risks to pluralism and diversity in the media and, in consequence, to democratic debate and commitment, if the current model, which includes public service, commercial and community media, is not preserved.

The aim of the Regional Conference was to gather representatives of the Public Broadcasting Services, relevant Ministries, regulatory authorities and non-governmental organisations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo and discuss independence, financing, the role and functioning of Public Broadcasting Service in the digital age.

The presentations given by the experts provided overview of the European standards concerning the independence of public service broadcasting and reminded that:

- Public service remit must be clearly and accurately defined and must be adapted to the new media environment;
- PSM Governance must be open and transparent;
- Funding must be sufficient, appropriate, and long-term.

Different models of financing of PBS in Europe and overall guarantees for independence related to regulatory framework, funding, appointments and editorial capacities were presented and discussed. Participants of the conference shared experiences of their countries and information about challenges related to digitalisation process and new opportunities.

After comprehensive discussion, participants concluded that the Public Broadcasting Services from this region are facing similar, almost the same problems. At the end, the conference highlighted the following issues as priorities for further action in this field:

1.

Legislative framework should be in line with European standards and state should enable its implementation and provide institutional guarantees the independence of the PBS (including the collection of licence fees, where applicable)

2.

Digitalisation is one the most important topic for almost all PBS from the region. It is need to send invitation to governments to support the digitalisation process and financial stability and suitability of PBS. The state should invest in the technical prerequisites for the digitalisation and education of citizens about change to digital broadcasting and introducing the new services. Also, PBS should adapt its working methods and capacity to a new digital environment, and give its contribution, informing and explaining the whole process to its auditorium. PBS could also invite the EBU to prepare the training plan for the countries of SEE on successful digitalisation process.

3.

Regional cooperation and presence of the Council of Europe. Importance of regional cooperation and organisation of the regional activities is recognised as important tool for addressing the existing problems in the media sector: to exchange good and bad practices and finding possible solutions jointly. Having in mind the important role of the PBS in democratic society and CoE legal expertise in the domain of freedom of expression, participants agreed that the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the EBU should be more present in the region and play the important part in achieving of European standards and support organisation of different activities that could be used as a platform for further discussion.

4.

Media literacy. The CoE and other international organisations should provide support to media literacy education, especially having in mind education about role and importance of the PBS. PBS should, by themselves, also, develop activities and programmes related to linking with the audience (feedback programmes and websites, editors' blogs and discussion online, to hear opinions, comments and suggestions related to PBS work) and promote European values and freedom of expression.

- ❖ The Council of Europe will search options to support above mentioned initiatives and remains at disposal to all participants for further cooperation.
- ❖ Colleagues from the EBU, kindly reminded that EBU members have access to many relevant documents on the following website: <http://www3.ebu.ch/expertise/media-intelligence>.