



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

Regional Conference Transparency in Media Ownership and Preventing Media Concentration

25-26 September 2014, Skopje

In the framework of the Project “Promoting freedom of expression and information and freedom of the media in South-East Europe (SEE)” the Council of Europe organised a Regional conference **“Transparency in Media Ownership and Preventing Media Concentration”** which took place on **25 and 26 September 2014, in Skopje.**

The aim of the Regional Conference was to gather representatives of the Media Regulatory Bodies, relevant Ministries, parliamentary committees and non-governmental organisations from South-East Europe to discuss importance, legal framework and current practices for ensuring transparency in media ownership.

In its recommendations related to this issue, the Council of Europe highlights that media freedoms and pluralism are vital for democracy, given their essential role in guaranteeing free expression of opinions and ideas and in contributing to peoples’ effective participation in democratic processes.

The fact is that globalisation and concentration are leading to the growth of multinational media and communications groups – these processes are fundamentally changing the media landscape and pose challenges in particular as regards preserving diversity of media outlets in small markets, but also in respect of the existence of a multiplicity of channels for the expression of plurality of ideas and opinions and to the existence of adequate spaces for public debate in the context of democratic processes.

After comprehensive discussion, participants concluded that there is a need to support further work on this issue that will lead to greater media ownership transparency and encourage all activities to promote media pluralism and diversity in the SEE region. Finally, the conference participants highlighted the following conclusions and issues as priorities for further action in this field:

- It is not easy to detect media concentration so it is important to have a precise legal framework and ensure its implementation that enables regulatory bodies to collect and make public information related to media ownership structures;

Legislation should be harmonised with EU standards. In countries that have adopted new laws, their proper implementation should be ensured. It would be important to achieve some kind of consensus from all stakeholders (regulators, media community, parliaments and ministries) to work towards transparency in the future;

- it is important to have a clear definition of the owner (who may be the owner and under what conditions) and clearly precise which data are to be registered. Also, it is important to discuss and define the legal nature of the media and devote a special event to this topic;
- ensuring regular updates of changes in ownership structure is crucial for transparency;
- journalists should be encouraged to write about prevention of unlawful concentration and transparency of media ownership. It is important to strengthen media literacy in the whole region – provide training for journalists and citizens and in that way to promote and support pluralism and diversity in media reporting;
- to propose the creation of a Code of conduct in all media, that will define the role of journalists, owner and editors in an effort to increase media professionalism and quality of media reporting;
- the role of Public Broadcasting Services is vital for diversity of information and there is a need to provide support that will enable PBS to fulfil its role in democratic society;
- ownership transparency of online media is vague. Additional attention should be given to the treatment of online media and this topic discussed at a future event.