

DRAFT MANIFESTO FOR THE
SEE MEDIA OBSERVATORY FINAL CONFERENCE

TOWARDS MEDIA POLICY IN THE SERVICE OF THE PUBLIC

The media crisis, which seriously affected the countries of South-East Europe, is in its essence the crisis of journalism and democracy. The two decades of non-transparent and politically guided privatization, with small media markets entangled in clientelistic networks and with state funds being directly or indirectly the main source of income for the majority of media outlets resulted in the destruction of the public communication space of such proportions that a radical media reform has become an exigency. If media do not fulfil their task – the safeguarding of the public interest in the process of public communication – and if they fail in their role as a watchdog of those in power, then democracy is not government in the interest of all people but in the interest of those who can afford it. Corrupt media spell a death sentence for democracy. Journalism that does not safeguard the public interest is the most destructive form of privatizing freedom of expression.

Radical reform calls for an active involvement of the government. The governments are obliged to provide and protect the communication rights of people. Funds that are currently awarded to the media, either directly or indirectly, are public funds, but in reality those state subsidies finance media owners whose only goal is to increase profit rather than ensure a quality public debate. Accordingly, the media subsidizing system should be revised and the governments should provide public sources and media policy instruments that would ensure a long-term and sustainable operation, development and flourishing of the public and non-profit media.

The public interest in the media field, which was hijacked by media companies, should be reclaimed by the public and should become the guiding principle in the shaping of future media policies geared towards securing media integrity. The media are so important for democracy that their managing and operation cannot be left to a small privileged group and cannot be the right of such a privileged minority only. The demand for functioning democracy, freedom and integrity of the media is our right and our duty.

**MEDIA
INTEGRITY
MATTERS**



South East European
MEDIAOBSERVATORY

WITH THIS MANIFESTO WE DEMAND:

- **THE INITIATION OF A RADICAL REFORM** of media policies which should focus on the public interest and media integrity. A first step in this comprehensive reform is a broad public debate which would lay down the foundation for the definition and realization of the public interest in the media field. The definition of the public interest should be a subject of political debates and negotiations between citizens and those who govern the state, to prevent clientelism from obstructing the lawmaking process and private interests from penetrating the media market disguised as legal norms;
- **THE DEFINITION OF CLEAR CRITERIA FOR ALLOCATING PUBLIC FUNDS TO THE MEDIA.** Allocation criteria should be strictly based on citizens' communication needs and not on the commercial interests of media owners. All procedures involving subsidies as well as media's spending of public funds should be transparent and honest, and their basic purpose should be to ensure media integrity. To fight corruption is to fight for democracy;
- **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SYSTEM OF PUBLIC SUBSIDIES FOR MEDIA AND JOURNALISM,** which would enable long-term and systematic shaping of alternative models of media financing. The existing direct and indirect media subsidies should be revised to establish to what extent they indeed assure media integrity. The revised mechanisms along with the new ones shaped in the process should follow the primary goal of creating conditions that would enable the media to operate in the public interest;
- **THE UNCOMPROMISING TRANSPARENCY OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT PUBLIC FUNDING.** To achieve this goal, open-access databases enabling efficient systematization, analysis and overview of media ownership and public funding are a must. Such databases should clearly list media owners, ownership ties and ties among media owners and centres of political power (political groups, institutions and individual politicians), and information on the public funding of the media. The management of such databases should be publicly funded and entrusted to independent experts and civil society through concessions;
- **BANNING THE MEDIA WITH NON-TRANSPARENT OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE FROM RECEIVING PUBLIC FUNDS, OR ANY OTHER FORM OF SUBSIDIES AND CONCESSIONS.** The high-integrity media can more easily fight corruption, clientelism, political instrumentalization and abuse of opinion-leader power;
- **THE DEFINITION OF TERMS FOR AWARDING GOVERNMENT-COMMISSIONED ADVERTISEMENTS TO INDIVIDUAL MEDIA OUTLETS.** The terms should be transparent and should comply with the rules of public procurements. In the countries where the flow of public funds is under exclusive control of political and/or economic elites, and accordingly the transparency and non-discriminatory terms of state-commissioned advertising cannot be ensured, the latter should be prohibited;

- **THE PROTECTION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA**, as the only public good available to citizens in the field of communication;
- **THE PREVENTION AND SANCTIONING OF ANY ATTEMPT** on the part of various political groups to close down or silence a public media outlet, or to destroy it by denying it public funds, as well as of any attempt at influencing the appointment of management and supervisory boards of the public service media. The public media need to be freed from the yoke of particular political interests so that they can regain their central position within a democratic public sphere. To achieve this goal, public media employees should form a progressive coalition with citizens with the aim of protecting the media autonomy and integrity;
- **ACCOUNTABILITY OF POLITICIANS**. Citizens should take a critical stance and engage in the political process to demand accountability of politicians who suppress freedom and integrity of public and other media. The right to freedom of expression and media integrity should be actively protected;
- **A SYSTEMATIC FUNDING OF QUALITY JOURNALISM AND SUPPORT FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM PROJECTS** and other types of quality journalistic production which is on the wane due to fast commercialization. In accordance with the democratic principles, the basic task of the media is to monitor the centres of political power and to enable citizens to participate in political activities and decision-making processes. Media policy that serves the public interest must support and develop the culture and practice of media integrity. The media that do not sustain the highest standards of journalistic practices and media management should not receive public subsidies and should not be allowed to use public resources;
- **A COMPREHENSIVE DEBATE ON JOURNALISM AND JOURNALISTS**. The journalists should initiate, within their associations and wider, a comprehensive debate on who can be considered a journalist and what journalism is, and define what they themselves can do to protect identity and integrity of their profession;
- **SYSTEMATIC FUNDING OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF JOURNALISTS**. The precarization of the journalistic profession threatens media freedom. Precarious journalism is not capable of serving the public interest. Special attention should be devoted to young journalists at the start of their careers. The state should provide stipends and formulate employment policies that would enable safe and encouraging working conditions for young journalists;
- **THE LEGAL MECHANISMS TO PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND EDITORIAL POSITIONS**. An editor is first among equals (journalists) and not an extended hand of executive boards and media owners. The task of the editor is to ensure that media integrity is always at the foundation of journalistic work;
- **ADEQUATE MECHANISMS FOR AN EFFICIENT SUPERVISION OVER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MEDIA POLICY**. Regulatory agencies in the media field should work in the public interest and should be the guardians of media integrity.

The members of regulatory bodies should not have conflict of interests, and before they take up their positions they should publicly declare their commitment to protect the public interest. If a regulatory body is unable to fulfil its role and ensure the realization of the highest media operation standards, it should announce this to the public and request assistance from international organizations to change the circumstances that obstruct its work. The most harmful form of regulation is one in which regulatory bodies fail to deliver on their tasks;

- **SUPPORT FOR NON-PROFIT LOCAL AND COMMUNITY MEDIA** which meet the information needs of local communities. The media crisis had most disastrous effect on local media and journalism. The shutting down of correspondent offices and deliberate non-covering of local political events creates an environment that breeds corruption. The public interest should be protected on the local, national and international/supra national level;
- **THE ALLOCATION, UNDER FAVOURABLE TERMS, OF THE PART OF THE BROADCASTING SPECTRUM TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES, CIVIL GROUPS AND INITIATIVES** which aim to create non-profit media programs and content;
- **SUPPORT FOR THE MEDIA LITERACY PROGRAMS AND ACTIVE INCLUSION OF CITIZENS IN THE SHAPING OF MEDIA POLICY.** Journalists and other media workers need to regain public trust in their profession. Media should develop various methods to include the public in its work. Citizens need to be aware that quality journalism must be adequately paid for. Active inclusion of citizens in media co-financing is not a supplement for public policy. It is a form of active participation within the media sphere;
- **PUBLICATION OF INDEPENDENT ESTIMATES OF BROADCASTING DIGITALIZATION COSTS.** These would show who profited from digitalization and who was pushed to the margins of the digitalized world;
- **A CONSISTENT SUPPORT FOR MEDIA INTEGRITY PRINCIPLES ON THE PART OF DONORS.** Donors' support influences the media system of the state or region in question in the long and short-term run. Donors should shun particular political goals and follow exclusively the general public interest;
- **RESPECT FOR THE HIGHEST LEGAL AND ETHICAL STANDARDS IN MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION ON THE PART OF FOREIGN OWNERS AND MEDIA CORPORATIONS WHO BUY OR ESTABLISH MEDIA IN SPECIFIC REGIONS.** Respect for tax, labour and media laws and creation of an environment that enables the autonomy and integrity of editors and journalists should be their first and foremost commitment;
- **A PROACTIVE APPROACH FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION.** The EC should, through political activity and using financial instruments intended for the candidate countries of South-East Europe, create the conditions conducive to the development of quality public media and should advocate for and protect freedom of expression as one of the basic human rights. The EU's demand that individual countries should ensure media freedom and

integrity should not be subject to particular political goals and compromises, but should be consistently and unconditionally implemented. The protection of media pluralism, respect for media integrity, protection of the public interest and support for the operation of public media are the foundations of a democratic media policy – in EU member states as well as other candidate countries of South-East Europe.

CITIZENS AND JOURNALISTS!

The above-listed demands have been formulated with clear aims in mind:

TO REGAIN INTEGRITY FOR THE MEDIA,
TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CREATION OF A MEDIA SYSTEM
WHICH WILL SERVE THE PUBLIC INTEREST, AND
TO DEMONSTRATE THAT CHANGES CAN BE MADE
IF WE KNOW WHAT WE WANT.



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