**Alternatives – Media reforms for media integrity and future of independent journalism**

**Search for alternatives to corrupt media systems in the countries of South East Europe**

**SEE Media Observatory’s final regional conference**

**Novi Sad, 13 June 2016**

**Session: The journalism/journalists then, now and in future**: Exchanging views of

journalists of different generations on situation of journalists and journalism then

and now, and in future – Where are the alternatives and leadership in saving

journalism with integrity?

**Speech by Caelainn Barr,**

**data journalist, The Guardian, UK**

I am going to take the next five minutes to talk about what is happening in journalism today. And ask – how can we try to protect strong, independent, quality journalism?

I work at *the Guardian* in London as a data journalist. A decade ago in the UK my role barely existed if at all. In the US data journalism, also known as computer assisted reporting, has been in newsrooms since the 1970s. Today the phrase “computer assisted” reporting, sounds outdated. Almost everything we do is assisted by the computer.

The theme of our discussion today is journalism – what is happening in our field and how can we protect and improve it? So the computer seems like a good place to start.

Let’s look at what is happening today. Today, there is no doubt, journalism is undergoing a period of severe disruption. The decline of print advertising over the past decade and furthermore the astonishing decimation of online advertising in the past 12 months has been a further confirmation that we are in the middle of a storm. Banner adverts no longer bring in the expected advertising revenues, ad-blocking software makes it more difficult to monetize the advertisements that are placed and newsrooms are in an increasingly delicate position when it comes to native advertising or sponsored content. And rather than having come through the worst, the pace of disruption is picking up.

We as journalists and media companies are at a stage where our publishing reach and our capability to reach our audience is in the hands of others. Yes, we are continuing to invest in and publish quality journalism, however, today social media, who you are connected to and who in that network shares what, to a large degree determines what people see and ultimately read.

Facebook is one of the biggest news sources for a growing number of new, young readers. This will only mean that social media platforms can become more and more powerful as they stand to become the distributors of news.

But let's step back for a moment and assess where we are. The pace of change is moving faster than ever before, traditional media models are under intense pressure but to some degree shouldn’t we be excited by the democratisation of information?

Shouldn’t the very profession that is based on free-speech and supports the idea of access to information and knowledge be excited and somewhat liberated by the development of technology that could allow us to do our job better? Yet, we’re not. We’re worried. We feel disempowered.

As journalists we are focused on the story, or content, however in the meantime the method of delivery has radically transformed. We have not got to grips with this radical change, let alone the pace with which it is happening.

So what can we do about it? The solution to the unfolding failure of media business models is not yet clear - paywalls, membership, media taxes - to date there is no one size fits all solution to paying for quality journalism. For the simple reason no one knows what the future of publishing will look like and it is becoming increasingly difficult to compete with *Facebook* or *Google*. Large tech companies are reimagining the publishing field in their own image and newsrooms are being marginalised.

Despite the disintegration of traditional models of funding and readership I believe there is absolutely still an audience for engaging, quality, in-depth reporting.

The new generation of readers are savvy to native advertising. They have grown up with it and are more attuned to how news is presented and delivered to them. People are clever and hungry and they don’t just want lists of condensed content. Audiences still want in-depth reporting and I believe they are willing to pay for it. What we need to figure out is how to get them to.

So how can we promote independent, quality journalism? It is just as important now, as ever, that we focus on continuing to create independent journalism.

Today a good journalist requires the same skills as a good journalist at any other time - a keen sense of a story; the ability to see the truth amid the spin; the desire to dig deeper, go further and at times a sense of disobedience. The requirements are the same as they always have been, as the journalism that is required is the same has it always has been.

New media models, creating quality in-depth investigative reporting, like that of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism in London, *Correct!v* in Berlin and *ProPublica* in New York, based on philanthropy and reader contributions, are on the rise. The model is exciting and encouraging yet it remains to be seen if these models can be sustained.

It is clear there is a market for real reporting. The question is how to create and distribute it in a way that pays.

The storm that is underway is not just here for the media, technology is disrupting every sector – from banking to transport. In considering how we want to create, distribute and consume news we are asking questions that are far greater than the problems that face us individually as reporters and editors.

The turmoil we’re experiencing is reshaping how information is distributed to the public. At this very point in time we, the media, have the power to shape our relationship with our readers, and it is vital that we engage.