**Central regional conference of the SEE Media Observatory:**

“Media and journalism in South East Europe –

Captured by particular interests or turning to serve the public?”

**Tirana, 12-13 June 2014**

**Session 6:**

**External view and context: are media integrity problems a regional or wider problem?**

Presentation by speaker:

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- Popular surveying indicates that the trust of people in the world is lower than ever.

In fact trust is lower in democracies. Most reactions suggest the audience means TV when it reflects about their trust in the media. Does it matter? Yes. Egypt

- China is the highest investor (budget-wise) in media development. In many Russian speaking countries or territories where Russian is a widely understood language, Russia Today and similar propaganda tools of the Kremlin are the most readily available and indeed in many cases most frequently watched international news source.

- In the Netherlands the most popular internship for TV students of journalism is to be part of RTL Boulevard, a commercial celebrity gossip show. The second internship of choice is to work for the sports programme of Public TV. Notably the investment in sports journalism is the highest budget-wise of all TV journalism.

- The most ground breaking development in the world, the worldwide web, has been taken over by corporations like Facebook, Google and others. Privacy, security and anonymity do not figure at the foreground for all these corporations. In fact, recent defence of Google against the “right to forget” ruling is attacked by the company calling it censorship. So we are not safe but in the hands ofothers.

- In most democratic ruled countries worldwide, public investment in media is on the decline, politicised investment in media on the rise. This accounts for hundreds of media corporations that are part of global corporate structures that do not have media ethics and information at its core.

- If we look at the latest Freedom House report on freedom of the press the summary of the last ten years tells tales: There has been worldwide improvement on legal frameworks. There are however almost fatal declines in political sense (impunity against journalists) and economic sense. The decline of independent media institutions worldwide is noticeable.

What does this tell us:

1) In spite of popular conceptions, people feel utterly disempowered with regards to the information they are being served. The widely held conception that the Internet has brought us the most open transparent and accurate information in history of mankind, is a bourgeois conception of people who are blinded by the fact that they can access more media sources than ever, while marginalised populations lack trusted media sources more than ever.

2) Journalists and media programmers feel (and I am not surprised by the surveying done in the South East European countries of your focus) feel utterly disempowered by the commercial and political powers that run theirs channels of information. This is true for all media outlets. In fact (anecdote Arab world Mohammed el Kak) when he described his feeling about the newspapers in the arab world.

3) The economic model for media has collapsed. Journalists and media actors feel under attack economically and react conservatively. Associations and trade unions fall back to the institutional model that has already failed to protect them. As a result young people are unorganised, not trusting the institutions that are clearly trying to protect the elder journalists interests while not doing anything for them. The resulting playing field is not nice. Journalists fight journalists for priviliges, for scoops, hoping that they can survive individually.

So what to do:

We should loose all our naive romantic ideals, especially those held by journalists themselves.

Rather than fielding vague conceptions of the fourth power and holding government to account, we should realise that governments have lost their capacity or even desire to steer developments.

a- Media are not run by government law but by economic laws that stimulate des-interest in information. Ownership is more and more in the hands of transnational corporations and / or national conglomerates that do not have information, journalism and serving the public as its core value, but profit making as its main target. Media institutions are on the decline.

b- Organise journalism production transnationally because corporations and governments that run our world operate transnationally. Sharing of information beats competition thousand folds. The examples of that are spreading around the world. Stop investing your energy and skills in the institutionalised media information pornography trying to attract audiences to sell advertisements.

3) Fix the disconnects between constituencies that are now operating separately:

- media development community

- media industry actors with the right interests

- the internet freedom community

- the open access and transparency movement

Any attempt to launch these processes compartmentalised are futile and fail already. So you should use what you have in house today: a collection of skilled well educated and well informed individuals that are networked. You should build this up. Reach out and bring in the young internet entrepreneurs, connect with those interested in transparency, and do not depend on institution building. It is the method of the past. Networking and collective action on relevant topics.

4) We need solidarity and reclaim ownership. Literally reclaim ownership. Stand out from the crowd and expulse the invalid nonsense and crap journalism that is dominant in our media. Be creative, funny, strong and attack. Get rid of the spirit of defaitism that is prevailing in our conferences and minds. One way to start change is changing your own mind. Become an activist.

5) Join [our struggle](http://gfmd.info/index.php/post2015) as Global Forum for Media Development to get media integrated in the post 2015 development goals. [Why?](http://gfmd.info/index.php/news/videos/)

- Because this will compel governments to measure the health of their media systems.

- It also will steer development funds for the coming 15 years. And we are underdeveloped sector

- Your countries have a say in the development of that in the UN general assembly discussions.

- Most notably Serbia and Romania as they are chairing part of that process.

We have developed an advocacy toolkit to influence your government and delegations at the UN, we want you to give us your best examples of why media matter in relation to developing change:

Stories of human development through media, of battling corruption, of improving health, of improving democracy. Of civil courage of journalists that made a difference. For the benefit of their audiences, not for self promotion. In the service of mankind. And we can, we drive information for the world, there is no excuse for non compliance.

*Paraphrasing a rather tacky hollywood movie:*

We live in serious times with serious problems. This requires serious people who fight.

They require serious people to step up and take leadership. It seems to me that we have a good collection of such actors around the table. Self organisation, self funding, stop the dependency.

GFMD will reconvene in Kiev 24-26 September 2014. Can we build an alternative Russian language news channel? Yes we can. Does it matter, yes it does.