**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:** **Alternative models of media funding – How to finance independent journalism and media**

**which serve public interest?**

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Thank you for the opportunity to be here!

A few words by way of introduction:

I work for the Program on Independent Journalism (previously known as the Media Program) of the Open Society Foundations.

There are three main areas (or, in our jargon, portfolios) in which the Program provides support: Opening Journalism, Investigative Journalism, and Free and Safe Journalism/ Freedom of Expression.

The Opening Journalism portfolio looks for and supports journalistic projects and media outlets that are trying various ways of enlarging their audiences, engaging them, building communities of supporters and thus, hopefully, making greater impact and moving towards greater sustainability - via more engaging story-telling, delivering content on a variety of platforms, bringing together journalists, coders, graphic designers and other specialists. (In some ways what it does resembles the work of the Dutch Journalism Fund). Similar work is being supported by the Investigative Journalism portfolio, on which I work, when it comes to investigative reporting organizations. Both portfolios inevitably have to grapple with the question of how these journalistic projects and organizations could be financially viable.

I believe that our support, as well as support of the most – if not all - other media donors, might not be a long-term answer to that question. For some of our grantees it is either a temporary relief (albeit in some cases “temporary” could mean several years), or some sort of philanthropic “venture capital” for those producing niche public service content. In some cases – when the pressure from governments or market forces on producers of this public service content is overwhelming - it could also be an “emergency option” for them. In other words, I tend to think of the financial support that we provide as an interim resource until more permanent and stable financing models could be found in each case. Except, probably, endowments - and I know of only one case where a donor endowed an investigative reporting non-profit - donor funding is not that permanent and reliable way towards financial survival.

However, as many of you experienced, it is extremely difficult – and might at times be impossible – to create a stable financial model. Even in the case of endowment, the investigative journalism non-profit in question – while having its financial basis secured - has to complement the income from the endowment by income from sales of content, data, organizing events and – again – look for donor support for bigger projects. It may well be that in the changed and changing environment in which journalists and media now operate there are no clearly pronounced, more or less universally applicable and replicable new funding models, comparable to the advertising/subscriptions and sales that media primarily relied on in the good old days. Therefore, philanthropy remains - and will remain for the foreseeable future - a necessary part of the system of funding independent public service journalism – along with earned revenue (from sales of content, data, services, advertising – particularly native advertising), support from the audiences – or rather communities forming around the outlets of this independent public service journalism - via crowd-funding or subscriptions; and – in certain cases – donations from public funds via various mechanisms (which should also ensure protection of editorial independence) that governments may set up.

It is important to note that some very good journalistic content nowadays is being produced as a collaborative effort of multiplicity of contributors - whereby the costs are shared, spread between the partners and thus covered from a variety of sources. The most notable example is Panama Papers investigation, the work on which involved over 370 journalists from, initially, almost 110 outlets – big and small – in 76 countries. Along well-established legacy media, such as Suddeutsche Zeitung, the BBC and public service broadcasters in other countries, The Guardian, Aftenposten, Le Monde, Gazeta Wyborcza and others, worked journalists based at small investigative reporting outlets from around the world, some of whom are here today. Whereas the overwhelming majority of these outlets, as well as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists that coordinated this project, rely on philanthropic funding, the legacy media shared the costs of the investigation by assigning their journalists to work on it for considerable duration of time, hosting meetings and providing other kind of support.

There are other examples of journalists, developers of IT tools, experts in various other fields getting together in *ad hoc* groups created for the purpose to produce important stories in the public interest, without forming organizations. From donors’ point of view this, I think, could be another way to support public service content without necessarily supporting maintenance of fixed structures that produce it. In other words, we are talking about sustainability of work, and not sustainability of organizations. I am not saying that this should replace funding for media outlets or journalists’ “cooperatives”, but it gives more choice for both journalists and donors, as well as opens another avenue of engagement by the public (formerly known as audience). For in the end, I believe, it is the public forming engaged communities around public service media outlets that, ideally, will provide not only financing, but also a degree of protection to them, as well as will demand accountability from them.

Thank you!