Working Paper

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International Assistance and Media Democratization in the Western Balkans: A Cross-National Comparison

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ANALITIKA
Center for Social Research

Sarajevo, 2013.

Regional Research
Promotion Programme | Western Balkans

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1.

Introduction

This is the concluding report of a project aiming to enhance the knowledge and understanding of conditions and factors that influence the creation of sustainable and functional media institutions in the democratizing countries of the Western Balkans, especially in contexts where there is a strong presence of international assistance programs and conditionality mechanisms. The project covers four countries that emerged from former federal Yugoslavia, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia[1] and Serbia, as well as a fifth country, Albania. This report summarizes and compares the country and subject-matter-specific contributions with the aim of exploring the nexus between the democratic transformation of the media and international media assistance as constrained by the local political conditions.

Although the countries of the Western Balkans share significant social, political, historical and economic traits, the region's recent trajectory has not been very coherent. Since the collapse of socialism in the 1990s, all five countries are undergoing a difficult transition to democracy and a free market economy. They have in common a post-authoritarian legacy, relatively small territories and weak economies. However, these similarities should not obstruct the recognition of important differences in political traditions, local cultures and ethnic composition of the population throughout the region.

In the past, political traditions of statehood differed significantly, characterised by periods of bloom and decline as well as external influences, notably from the Ottomans and the Austrian empire. The region's conflict-ridden history has inspired the term Balkanization, which is widely used to describe a process of geopolitical fragmentation. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia and war with the Serbian hegemon, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo were founded as modern states. Macedonia was also affected by a limited conflict between its two majority peoples – Macedonians and Albanians. NATO undertook extensive military interventions against Serb forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, and in Kosovo and Serbia in 1999. Albania alone went through a peaceful transition albeit the country took in many war refugees, mainly from Kosovo.

All of the countries in the focus of this project are multi-ethnic but their composition varies to a significant degree. In Albania and Kosovo, Albanians are by far the majority people but there is a significant Serb minority in the latter. Serbia's

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[1]   In international relations referred to as 'The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'.

dominant majority are Serbs (83 percent of the population). In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the home of three constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) and in Macedonia ethnic Macedonians and Albanians coexist, among others.

Today, out of these five Western Balkan countries two are in the antechamber of the European Union (EU). For some time already Macedonia and, recently, Serbia have had candidate status but the pre-accession negotiations are open-ended. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania are still potential candidate countries, and thus further away from their ultimate aim to accede to the EU. Striving for EU membership requires from these Western Balkan countries to comply with its democratic and market economy standards (the so-called 'Copenhagen Criteria'). Today EU conditionality is a major driver of reforms in the region.

2.

Research Questions and Methodology

The project compares the extent to which the media institutions that have been significantly supported or established by international assistance programs and conditionality have actually been able to reach a level of sustainability and functionality. In its quest to discover how far international assistance programs and conditionality facilitated the development of defining media institutions this report is based on five country studies that follow a unified methodology and four subject-matter-specific comparative studies. The theoretical background underpinning this project combines three strands of literature: first, theories on democratization and democratic consolidation, second, transition in post-authoritarian countries and Europeanization, and third, concepts of international assistance and development. Herein the transformation of local media systems is not considered in isolation but as part of a larger transformation process of the social and political system.[2] The countries have been asked to consider and reflect on these theories in relation to the local political system and the media system. The aim was to produce contextual information before describing international media assistance and the specific case studies.

The comparative analysis takes a multilevel approach: First, within each country, the transformation of and international assistance[3] to domestic media institutions are juxtaposed in order to investigate why certain policy sub-systems flow better through transformational stages than others. In accordance with the comparative 'multilevel case study' approach deployed, within each country three to four selected media institutions were studied in depth (Table 1). For their central role in the national media system, the media regulatory authority and the public service media operator are covered for each country. Additionally, one or a couple of other country-specific media institutions are included – such as a commercial media outlet, a media self-regulatory body or a media advocacy organization – allowing for diversification across countries, provided the organization was the beneficiary

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[2]   Karol Jakubowicz, "Lovebirds?: The Media, the State and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe," *Javnost/The Public* 2, no. 1 (1995), pp. 75-91.

[3]   International media assistance can be delivered in various forms including outright external intervention and soft-power conditionality mechanisms, or through locally driven reforms with limited external assistance.

of international media assistance. The country studies are based on desk research, direct contact with donors in order to obtain relevant data, as well as interviews with local media experts and representatives of international donor organizations.

Second, a cross-national comparison is used to query how the varying intensity of international assistance impacts the democratic transformation of media. Two subject-matter-specific comparisons cover the issue of public service broadcasting in these five Western Balkan countries, and two centers for investigative journalism - in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. This concluding report synthesizes the country studies and comparative reports to a cross-national comparison and derives high-level policy conclusions from it. Our comparative approach is that of the *most similar system design*[4] – we look for differences in media assistance approaches and in outcomes in terms of sustainability and functionality of media institutions while we assume that the contextual factors are similar enough across the studied countries. Although there are inevitable differences among the five countries in terms of paths and dynamics of their media democratization and overall democratic transition, basic contextual characteristics of relevance for our study surface throughout the case studies, namely the nature of the media markets, political interference in the media sector, weak professionalization but strong instrumentalization of journalism, and lackluster implementation of media reforms, to name only few.

This allows us to focus on the two aspects of interest to our study and compare them across the five countries: the extent to which media institutions are sustainable and functional in relation to the relevant international assistance programs and conditionality linked to those institutions in a given context. As media institutions in the Western Balkan region are often modelled after similar institutions in Western European democracies, the outcomes invariably differ from the prototype. The contributions and this concluding report shed light on the question of what happens to imported models when they are transposed onto the newly evolving media systems of transitional societies in the Western Balkans.

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[4]   Giovanni Sartori, "Comparing and Miscomparing," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 3, no. 3(1991), pp. 243-257; Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3(1971), pp. 682-693. Jonathan Hopin, "Comparative Methods," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science,* ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 249-267.

Table 1: Country reports and in-depth case studies

Country	Media regulatory authority	Public service media operator	Other media institution
Albania	- National Council of Radio and Television (*Këshilli Kombëtar i Radios dhe Televizionit*, KKRT)	- Albanian Public Radio and Television (*Radio Televizioni Shqiptar*, RTS)	- Union of Albanian Journalists (*Unioni i Gazetarëve Shqiptarë*, UGSH)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	- Communications Regulatory Agency, CRA (*Regulatorna agencija za komunikacije*, RAK)	- Public Service Broadcasting System, PSB (*Javni RTV sistem*)	- Open Broadcast Network (OBN) - Press Council (*Vijeće za štampu*) - Center for Investigative Reporting (*Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo*, CIN)
Kosovo	- Independent Media Commission, IMC (*Komisioni i Pavarur i Mediave*, KPM)	- Radio Television of Kosovo, RTK (*Radiotelevizioni i Kosovës*)	- Press Council of Kosovo (*Këshilli i Mediave të Shkruara të Kosovës*)
Macedonia	- Broadcasting Council (*Sovetot za radiodifuzija*)	- Macedonian Radio Television (*Makedonska radiotelevizija*, MRTV)	- Macedonian Institute for Media (*Makedonski institut za mediumi*, MIM)
Serbia	- Republic Broadcasting Agency, RBA (*Republička radiodifuzna agencija*, RRA)	Public Service Broadcasting of Serbia (*Radio-televizija Srbije*, RTS)	- B92 (Private TV station) - Center for Investigative Reporting Serbia (*Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo Srbije*, CINS)

However, in spite of the efforts to gather new information, the research is limited by insufficient documentation of international media assistance. Available data is highly fragmented and does not permit reliable insights on funds invested across international media assistance projects in the Western Balkan countries. In fact, the estimations in Rhodes' 2007 report are still the most cited, including in the country studies in this project.

Table 2: Media Assistance in Western Balkans 1996-2006 (in Euro)

	Training	Direct Support	Media Environment	Total Euro
Albania	6.9	1.8	1.9	10.6
Bosnia-Herzegovina	17.4	42	27.7	87.1
Croatia	2.4	19.7	14.5	36.6
Macedonia	3.4	9.2	11.2	23.8
Montenegro	1.3	2.9	3.4	7.6
Serbia	5.4	26.4	13.1	44.9
Kosovo	6.1	45.6	6.9	58.6
Balkans	42.9	147.6	78.7	269.2

Source: Aaron Rhodes, *Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans: An Assessment* (Amsterdam: Media Task Force of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, 2007), p. 15.

Conditionality is even more difficult to approach empirically since local stakeholders carry out democratic reforms in order to comply with requirements of third parties, notably in the run-up to EU membership. Thus, it is hard to determine which reforms were externally imposed and which correspond to local demands, or whether they (most likely) developed as a combination of both.

Moreover, economic indicators that would measure local media markets are not gathered systematically, thus obfuscating media revenues, such as from advertisements, subscriptions or subsidies. This lack of transparency makes it impossible to establish how local media are financing their operations as well as whether, and which, media can be considered sustainable businesses.

3.

Media in Transition

When the socialist era ceased at the end of the 1980s, the media systems of all the countries in the focus had a similar point of departure. Under socialist rule, all broadcasting media was operated by the state and print media was tightly controlled, while propaganda and (self)censorship were commonplace. The transition paths that local media systems passed through, however, started to differentiate very early. It was evident that any transition was delayed in those countries that were a party to the latest series of conflicts in the Western Balkans, and during this period media in particular was instrumentalized:

- During the Milošević regime, Serbian mainstream media was serving government propaganda;
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the media was ethnically divided and in most cases openly war-mongering; and
- In Kosovo, broadcast media in Albanian language had been banned entirely by the Serbian regime.

Moreover, the **legal vacuum** that followed socialist rule and the violent conflicts does not compare to orderly liberalisation and de-regulation; rather, entry into the media market has been more an ad hoc seizure of opportunity. For Western Balkan countries most of the decade of the 1990s has been characterised as chaotic because the use of the broadcasting spectrum was disorganised and early commercialisation of print and broadcast media rushed in without a regulatory framework in place. In all of the five countries studied, media outlets initially proliferated to hundreds of press products and radio and TV stations. Subsequently the issued regulation and its supervision had to assert itself before the market eventually complied with it to a certain extent. For instance, Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina subsequently granted licenses to most radio and TV stations in operation, and this was apparently only limited by technical constraints. However, little consideration was given to the strategic development of the broadcast media markets.

As of the early 2000s, the transformation paths of the media systems in the five Western Balkan countries converge in what is considered the **European media model**. The general characteristics of this model are that:

- The law distinguishes between press and broadcast media with a press that should be self-regulating while broadcast media is subject to extensive regulation.[5]
- Implementation and enforcement of local broadcast media legislation is delegated to independent media supervisory authorities, i.e. public bodies that should be formally and in practice independent from both, elected politicians and the broadcasting industry.
- Originating in the broadcasting sector the so-called dual media system provides for the co-existence of independent public service TV and radio and private broadcasters.[6]

With the exception of Kosovo, where the public service broadcaster was built from scratch,[7] the public service media organizations are the product of the reform of the former state broadcasters in the remaining four countries.

In the Western Balkans, democratic media transformation involves very intense and complex reform processes. In less than a decade, media systems in Western Balkan countries underwent **four fundamental reforms**:

1. Liberalisation in addition to the introduction of new media legislation and a media supervisory authority;
2. Transformation of the state broadcaster (radio and television) to public service media organization/s;
3. Facilitating the digital switch-over/ analogue switch-off of terrestrial broadcasting as well as overall digitalisation of media across all platforms; and
4. Introduction of a self-regulatory framework alongside the development of professional supporting organizations, such as associations of journalists, specialized training centers, industry associations, etc.

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[5] Pursuant to EU developments broadcast media legislation is extended to audiovisual media services that are broadcast-like.

[6] Mark Thompson, "Looking for Shortcuts? Assistance to – and Development of – Public Service Broadcasting in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania," Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 9/2013, prepared in the framework of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) (Sarajevo: Analitika – Center for Social Research, 2013), p. 10.

[7] Naser Miftari, "Starting from Scratch: The Role of Media Assistance in the Establishment of Independent Media Institutions in Kosovo," Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 4/2013, prepared in the framework of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) (Sarajevo: Analitika – Center for Social Research; Prishtina: D4D – Democracy for Development, 2013), p. 35.

The cumulative media reform needs had to be tackled all at once contributing to constant change in Western Balkan media systems, which hardly evokes perceptions of consolidation and stability.

The implementation of these key reforms needed supporting strategies, legislation and institutions. Characteristically, media transformation in countries that are undergoing a much larger democratic transition process is least likely to receive optimal support. Typically, **local restraints on democratic media transition** are three-fold:

1. Media reforms stall because important media legislation and strategies are not adopted; while
2. Pieces of existing media legislation or other norms that have an effect on the local media system are constantly put up for revision by successive governments; and
3. Media policy objectives and legislation on the one hand, and implementation and practice on the other hand, are out of step to varying degrees, since the rules and policies are often selectively interpreted and applied;

The country studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia provide ample evidence for all three deficits, sometimes cumulatively; however, issues may accrue over successive governments' terms. Albania is certainly not without setbacks in media transition but judging from Ilda Londo's country study it appears that important media reforms have been tackled, albeit slowly, and central media institutions are left relatively undisturbed by legislative reforms.[8]

Although this research was not tasked with measuring the performance of the Western Balkan countries, a look at the trends from the IREX Media Sustainability Index below (Figure 1) reveals that compared to the point of departure in the early 2000s all countries show progress on specific key dimensions of free media.[9] However, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia outperformed their peers in the recent past only to drop again to what is the regional average, or, in the case of Macedonia, even below. Possible explanations for the initial progress in local media systems and the recent stabilisation at moderate levels could be that:

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[8] Ilda Londo, "Limited Assistance for Limited Impact: International Media Assistance in Albania," Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 2/2013, prepared in the framework of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) (Sarajevo: Analitika – Center for Social Research & Tirana: AMI – Albanian Media Institute, 2013), p. 14, 17.

[9] The IREX Media Sustainability Index groups indicators in relation to five objectives, i.e. free speech, professional journalism, plurality of news sources, business management and supporting institutions, cf. International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), "Media Sustainability Index (MSI) Methodology", July 14, 2011.

- Early democratic transition was more motivated to correspond with democratic ideals and international best practices - a motivation that with subsequent governments and political elites has gradually worn off compared to the will to reach and cement political power; representative examples are Macedonia and Serbia;
- Democratic media transition was to a significant extent induced externally, notably as a result of powers given to international actors, such as, for example, in the case with the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina; but this effect is not (yet) showing as forcefully for Kosovo; or
- In many situations it is likely that an amalgamation of both strands, decreasing local motivation as well as retracting international media assistance and monitoring, in practice results in toleration of political influence extending (again) to key media institutions as well as economically fraught mass media being (re-)enlisted by political and private interests.

Figure 1. Western Balkans: IREX MSI
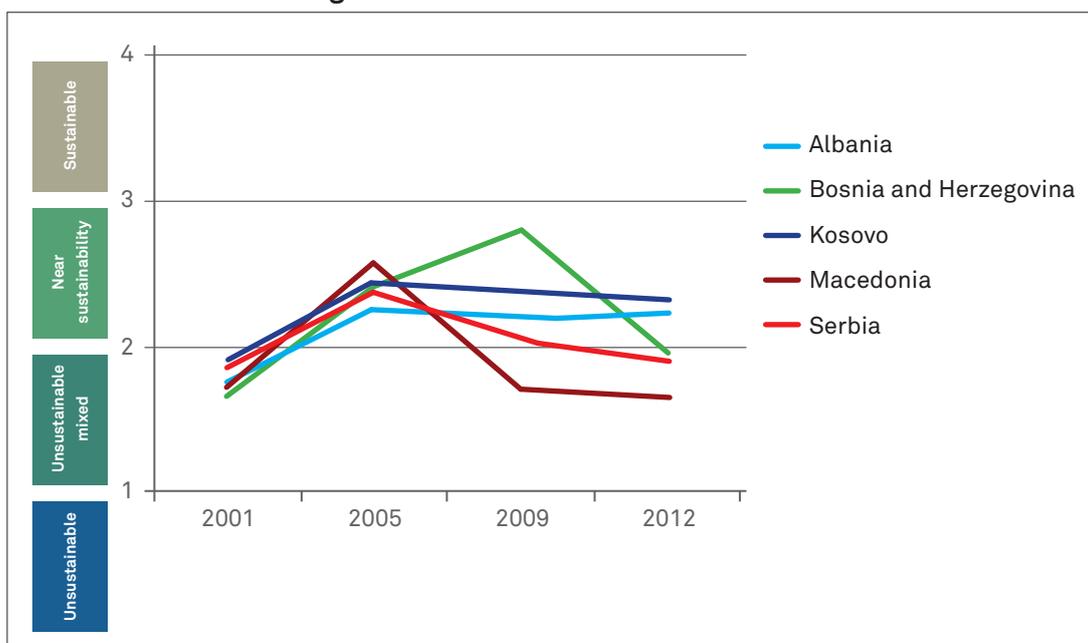
Source: IREX MSI for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia 2001, 2005, 2009, and 2012 (cf. country studies).

It is now widely accepted that imported media institutions and standards likely divert from the ideal-type models of similar institutions originating in Western democracies and media theory. The literature advances different theses that explain these variations as a result of the local context and conditions but also of the time required for democratic development and consolidation. Karol Jakubowicz invokes 'ontogenesis' as an analogy illustrating how local media institutions pass through similar stages of evolution as media institutions did elsewhere, although

perhaps more compressed and with open outcomes.[10] Other authors stress the process of social construction during which imported values blend with local practices, as a result of which 'atavistic' or 'hybrid' media systems emerge.[11] Consequently, navigating the different trajectories on democratic media transition in the Western Balkan region requires a high degree of contextualisation as well as an understanding of the evolutionary development and the social construction of the local media institutions.

3.1   Quality of Democracy

There is now agreement across democratisation and development literature that any transformation of local (media) institutions is contingent upon the political context and the overall state of democratic consolidation in the country.[12] Both schools recognise that democratic development is a non-linear and open-ended process – in other words it is not possible to orchestrate results but only processes that may be conducive to buttressing democratic values and practices. Consolidation of democracy starts once critical institutions and procedures for democratic governance are in place. There may be situations where certain policy sub-systems and institutions develop ahead of the average pace of democratic transition but the interdependencies with other state institutions and practices can severely obstruct their ability to consolidate.

For the Western Balkan countries, the starting point has been anything but favorable because efforts towards democratic media transformation are

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[10]   Karol Jakubowicz, Preface to *The Independence of the Media and its Regulatory Agencies Shedding New Light on Formal and Actual Independence Against the National Context,* ed. Wolfgang Schulz, Peggy Valcke and Kristina Irion (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), p. xvi.

[11]   Karol Jakubowicz and Miklos Sükösd, "Twelve Concepts Regarding Media System Evolution and Democratization in Post-Communist Societies," in *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Changes in a Global Perspective*, ed. Karol Jakubowicz and Miklos Sükösd (Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2008), p. 12.; Katrin Voltmer, "How Far Can Media Systems Travel? Applying Hallin and Mancini's Comparative Framework Outside the Western World," in *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, ed. Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Katrin Voltmer, "Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans: Lost between Models and Realities," Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 10/2013, prepared in the framework of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) (Sarajevo: Analitika – Center for Social Research, 2013), p. 15.

[12]   For the media sector Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. I, 8; Peter Humphreys, *Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 2; Jakubowicz, Preface, p. xiii; and Jan Zielonka and Paolo Mancini, *Executive Summary: A Media Map of Central and Eastern Europe* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2011), p. 2.

confronted with "legacies of undemocratic structures, politicians, and traditions"[13]. The country reports confirm a number of contemporary challenges to what would ideally amount to an 'enabling environment' for the local media systems, notably that the rule of law and tenets of good governance are, even where they are in place, not effective.[14] As Davor Marko aptly puts it for Serbia: "It has the form (laws, institutions, procedures, party pluralism, etc.) but lacks the substance of a meaningful democratic political culture."[15] The **ethnic composition** of the local population, which in some cases results in linguistic diversity, very much influences the political system. For Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Macedonia, this has as a consequence that the mass media is also divided along linguistic and ethnical lines. Post-conflict situations present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo pose additional challenges because media can play a role in reconciliation but it can also work against it.

Western Balkan countries share many if not most of the characteristics Jan Zielonka and Paolo Mancini identified in relation to other Central and Eastern European countries that undergo democratic transition, namely features that are indicative of the politicization of the state, weak rational-legal authority,[16] in addition to a general implementation deficit.[17] The politicised state connotes a situation in which political parties and other vested interests try to conquer public and state institutions in order to extract resources from them.[18] In short, public policy and administration are informed by the ad hoc needs of the politicians in power and the informality of rules to the detriment of formal institutions and the rule of law. A change of government inevitably turns the wheel of fortune that rewards political loyalty in the public sector and in the relationship of the state vis-à-vis the private sector.

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[13] Monroe Price, Bethany Davis Noll and Daniel De Luce, *Mapping Media Assistance* (Oxford: University of Oxford; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002).

[14] I.e. fairness, impartiality and objectivity of administrative processes, cf. Krishna Kumar, *One Size Does not Fit All: Objectives and Priority Areas for Media Assistance in Different Societies* (Washington: Center for International Media Assistance; National Endowment for Democracy, 2009), p. 14; Monroe Price and Peter Krug, "The Enabling Environment for Free and Independent Media," in *Media Matters: Perspectives on Advancing Governance and Development from the Global Forum for Media Development*, ed. Mark Harvey (Paris: Internews Europe, 2006), p. 97f.

[15] Davor Marko, "Media Reforms in Turbulent Times: The Role of Media Assistance in the Establishment of Independent Media Institutions in Serbia," Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 6/2013, prepared in the framework of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) (Sarajevo: Analitika – Center for Social Research, 2013), p. 12.

[16] Pursuant to Max Weber, "The Three Types of Legitimate Rule", *Berkeley Publications in Society and Institutions* 4, no. 1(1958), pp. 1-11.

[17] Zielonka and Mancini, *Executive Summary: A Media Map of Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 2f.

[18] Anna Grzymała-Busse, "Political Competition and the Politicization of the State in East and Central Europe," *Comparative Political Studies* 36, no. 10(2003), p. 1123f.

The country report accounts of the nexus between political and media systems exemplify a high degree of politicization that comes to the fore as follows:

- Across the region, mass media editorial lines are often partisan; in the case of the public service media organization it was reported to favour the government at the time, whereas the political allegiances of the press and commercial television are distributed across the political spectrum.[19] Albania, Macedonia and Serbia report a rise of clientelist media, in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a characteristic overlapping of ethnical with political patronage in the media.
- Partisan media is even more pronounced during election times in Western Balkan countries. This was noted explicitly in the country reports of Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia.
- In each of the countries covered by this research political pressure on key media institutions is cited as commonplace, notably on the local media supervisory authority or the public service media organization. An additional characteristic is the significant post-electoral vulnerabilities when new governments in power re-politicise appointments to the boards of these bodies, for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia.
- Public money, which is a significant source of media revenues across the region, is often allocated in a non-transparent way and arguably follows clientelistic lines. This issue is especially flagged for Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The statutory independence of public service media is de facto undermined by the organizations' reliance on state funding.
- Career paths of certain journalists signify a revolving door between media and political affiliations and jobs, as reported for Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. It has been established that many media owners in Kosovo and Macedonia were or are still elected politicians or *cadres* in the local partitocracy.

In relation to the media sector, the differences of the political systems in the Western Balkan region have not yet played out significantly. For example, for the local media systems it does not seem to matter whether the country's political system is majoritarian, as is the case for Albania, Serbia, and Kosovo, or polarized pluralist, as is the case for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Contrary to what is suggested in the theory developed in the context of Western democracies, neither political system has achieved better media policy stability or has protected

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[19] In this context, Katrin Voltmer's contribution is very instructive because it critically engages with existing high notions of media pluralism and objectivity. Voltmer, "Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans".

independent media institutions better against partisanship and political influence.[20] In other words, neither constitutional veto points nor coalition governments are less likely to conflate political power with influence over the media and its key institutions. The pursuit of genuine public interest objectives, including media reforms, is often side-lined as a deliverable to satisfy EU conditionality, e.g. in Serbia.

The two countries with strong ethnic differences grant veto-powers to their respective ethnic constituencies, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a measure to secure peace and in the case of Macedonia in order to protect Albanian minority interests from Macedonian majority rule. The ethnic and corresponding territorial divisions are replicated in the political landscape; however, this polarization often cannot be bridged by consensus. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where three public service broadcasters co-exist, efforts to unify public service broadcasting under a common roof have not yet succeeded.[21] Interestingly, the politics of consensus appear to work best whenever elected politicians attempt to retain or increase their influence over the media but are less in favour of independent media institutions. The country report covering Macedonia describes a "pedantic distribution of spheres of influence" of Macedonian politicians over Macedonian media and Albanian politicians over Albania media.[22]

For all Western Balkan countries it was reported that civil society is not a decisive factor in public policy. Yet, for each country under consideration one or even more dedicated non-governmental organizations specialise in media policy and advocacy, most of which have received funding from international donors for their work. They are crucial for claiming transparency and participating in legislative processes that concern the media and for being vigilant and vocal about interferences with media and journalistic freedoms. At the same time it becomes apparent from the country reports that many non-governmental organizations that used to focus on media freedoms and freedom of expression discontinued or significantly limited their work often due to a lack of funding. Industry associations, however, became gradually more influential when representing commercial media interests in media policy-making.

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[20]   Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, p. 298; George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press; New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), p. 6.

[21]   Tarik Jusić and Nidžara Ahmetašević, "Media reforms Through Intervention: International Media Assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 9/2013, prepared in the framework of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) (Sarajevo: Analitika – Center for Social Research, 2013), p. 42.

[22]   Tamara Dimitrijevska-Markoski and Zhidas Daskalovski, "Assisting Media Democratization after Low-Intensity Conflict: The Case of Macedonia," Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 5/2013, prepared in the framework of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) (Sarajevo: Analitika – Center for Social Research; Skopje: CRPM - Center for Research and Policy Making, 2013), p. 12.

3.2   Media Economics

The democratic transformation of media systems in the Western Balkans faces comparatively **difficult media economics.** Local media markets are very small in terms of audiences, ranging from just below two million inhabitants in Kosovo to seven million in Serbia. Advertisement financed media competes for very limited sources of revenue which is further exacerbated by the high number - in relation to the size of the media market and viewership - of print, radio and television outlets. All country reports note some degree of oversaturation in media markets the side effects of which are that private mass media ties in with politics and businesses for revenues. The overall unfavourable economic conditions after the 2008 global financial crisis have led to a further decline in advertisement spending which disproportionately affects the print media.

In all Western Balkan countries the public sector, including state-owned companies, is one of the most significant sources of funding for media that carry advertisements, campaigns and other public communications. This issue was specifically highlighted for Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia but appears to be present across the region. The resulting financial dependencies are a cause of concern whenever funds are not transparently allocated and possibly directed towards government-friendly media. Moreover, direct subsidies by the state to media outlets are quite common, for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina and through local government in Serbia. This is regardless of the financing from public sources of the public service media in these countries, which in addition compete for advertising revenues with commercial media outlets.

Western Balkan media markets are highly susceptible to '**business parallelism**', which refers to the residual overlapping of 'economics, politics and the media' in post-socialist countries.[23] Where there is no business in media, media becomes the business because it amplifies interests other than the public interest. Especially in highly polarized and politically fragmented contexts, media outlets that compete for rather limited resources can alternatively extract their revenue from political patronage and clientelism.[24] All country reports document fuzzy ownership issues where owners, financial stakes and political affiliations are not transparent. Compared to direct political influence, however, the issues of ownership and cross-

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[23]   Zielonka and Mancini, *Executive Summary: A Media Map of Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 4f. Colin Sparks, "Media Theory after the Fall of European Communism: Why the Old Models from East and West Won't Do Anymore," in *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, ed. James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 34f.

[24]   Hawley M. Johnson, "Model Interventions: The Evolution of Media Development Strategies in Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia from 2000 to 2007" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012), p. 80f.; Zielonka and Mancini, *Executive Summary: A Media Map of Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 3.

subsidization are more subtle means to influence the editorial line of media outlets beyond the reach of constitutional and legal safeguards of media independence.

With a few exceptions, foreign media investors are not very prominent in Western Balkan countries. However, the international community did finance a fair number of media operations during the early 1990s in Serbia as well as in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The only notable development is the entry of Al Jazeera Balkans, which began broadcasting in local languages in late 2011.

3.3 Journalistic Profession and Professionalism

In these conditions, it is no wonder that the attractiveness of the journalistic profession suffers and that journalists' careers can take many directions. The country reports point out that the career paths of some journalists oscillate between media and political appointments. Moreover, it is important to note that the issue of media professionalism is not just about instilling adequate qualifications and journalistic values in fledgling and practicing journalists. As long as media patrons cannot afford and/or do not value certain qualities in journalistic professionalism even the most capable journalists may find it difficult to apply the highest standards in their daily work. Nevena Ršumović's comparison of dedicated centres for investigatory journalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia illustrates well the dilemmas that led to the creation of such specialised journalistic hubs outside mainstream media.[25]

Other consequences of still developing journalistic professionalism are that across the region mechanisms of self-regulation and self-governance symptomatically lack acceptance and support from their own constituency, i.e. press and media outlets, journalists and editors. Since under the European media model the press especially should be self-regulating this poses a Catch 22 situation between the local capacity and imported best practices.

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[25] Nevena Ršumović, "The Uncertain Future: Centers for Investigative Journalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia," Working Paper Series on International Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, Working Paper 7/2013, prepared in the framework of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) (Sarajevo: Analitika – Center for Social Research, 2013).

4.

International Media Assistance

Western Balkan countries have been beneficiaries of international media assistance programs to varying degrees. Because of the intensity of media reforms and institution building, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are the two post-conflict countries that exemplify international media interventions.[26] International media assistance programs did also target Albania, Macedonia and Serbia but to a lesser degree. Even within this group, there are significant differences in the scope and the nature of media assistance, with much more extensive support to Serbia compared to fairly moderate assistance programs in Albania.[27]

Between the early 1990s and today, international media assistance to Western Balkan countries can be classified in three phases, which show some overlap:

Phase 1: Supporting independent media (throughout the 1990s and early 2000s) with the aim of overcoming information monopolies, such as in Serbia during the Milosevic regime, and to contribute to reconciliation after the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

Phase 2: Media reforms and institution building (1998 until 2005) throughout the Western Balkans, with different intensity however, focusing on the provision of assistance in the context of media legislation, the introduction of a media supervisory body and the transition from state to public service broadcaster, in addition to support for self-regulatory bodies, advocacy organizations and industry associations in the media.

Phase 3: Phasing out international media assistance (2005 until today) is characterised by a significant roll-back of international media assistance across the region, often relying on the role of the EU and respective EU accession procedures in which conditionality is believed to be the new engine for democratic media transition. This goes hand-in-hand with the ultimate handover of ownership of and responsibility for media institutions to local stakeholders - a process of domestication. In Kosovo and Macedonia, scaled back media assistance focuses almost exclusively on support to minority media.

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[26]   Mark Thompson and Dan de Luce, "Escalating to Success? The Media Intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina", in *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights and the Management of Media Space*, ed. Monroe Price and Mark Thompson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).

[27]   Aaron Rhodes, *Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans: an Assessment* (Amsterdam: Media Task Force of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, 2007).

From today's vantage point, when assessing the media assistance programs, the results are varied, both among countries, and among different media sub-systems within all of the countries studied. Some of the internationally backed efforts produced fairly sustainable media institutions, while others ended in failure or are - to say the least - vulnerable to systemic and business parallelism. Yet other projects and programs witnessed initial progress followed by later stagnation or even return to earlier authoritarian practices and norms.

4.1   International Actors

International actors can be broadly distinguished by their respective functions and put into two groups: those organizations that influence local media policy and institution building, and others that provide operational support targeting media in the Western Balkans. This does not preclude some actors being active on both levels.

From the first group, the most prominent international actors are those equipped with an international mandate, such as the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Other significant actors in democratic media transition throughout the Western Balkans are the U.S., EU, OSCE, and Council of Europe. Their relationships were more closely-knit, including delegating specific media mandates to the OSCE in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Nonetheless, even among the top-tier organizations approaches differed considerably, reflecting different values and priorities.

The second group of international actors is much more diverse, comprising of other countries, development and non-governmental organizations as well as a plethora of implementing agencies. Their contributions have been significant but disparate, lacking overarching strategies and coordination.

4.2   Goals and Approaches of International Media Assistance

According to Rhodes there are two main and interrelated categories of goals and objectives of media support in Western Balkans: on one level, there are political and social goals, on the other are media-specific objectives.[28] Assistance programs that aimed to achieve political and social goals looked to the media as a tool for changing society at large, for example by helping remove authoritarian regimes,

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[28]   Ibid, p. 11.

by protecting human rights, reinforcing peace agreements, easing ethnic tensions, promoting democratization, helping state and nation building, and supporting European integration. Programs with media-specific objectives were intended to help the development of a free and professional media sector based on Western models of professional and responsible media. Inevitably, these two levels of goals and objectives were intrinsically linked: political and social goals by definition created the demand for media-specific objectives, while media-specific objectives worked towards achieving political and social goals.[29]

The approach to media assistance was based on several core assumptions about the roles and the values associated with the function of the media in a democratic system according to the idealized model of a 'developed Western democracy'.[30] Hence, the media assistance efforts were aimed at developing 'professional' and 'objective' journalists and 'independent' and 'impartial' media outlets,[31] that would be financially sustainable and would offer a 'plurality' of different views when covering political issues and current events. An adequate legal and regulatory framework is seen as one of the key elements of a functional democracy, for conflict mitigation, and towards Europeanization. However, the differences between the socio-cultural and political contexts of Western Balkan countries compared to those in Western democracies manifest as contingencies in local media institutions and practices that differ in many respects from the Western-democratic models according to which local media systems were modelled.[32]

This shall not be interpreted in such a way to suggest that international media assistance promoted the wrong values of media in the Western Balkan region. In these countries, the constitutional protection of freedom of expression and media freedoms is necessary to counter state encroachments on such rights. Local media policy and legislation that corresponds to European best practices has been instrumental in opening up media markets, combating hate speech, decriminalizing defamation and introducing elementary journalistic privileges, such as source protection.[33] Where they exist, high formal standards lay the foundations for professional and plural media. Most country reports conclude that the local fragmented media sphere holds external pluralism but that this does not compound to a nation-wide, inter-ethnic or cross-political public discourse. The local organizations, alone when it comes to public service media, fail to live up to their remit to cater for objective reporting and the coverage of diverse viewpoints.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Voltmer, "Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans," p. 9.

[31] Johnson, "Model Interventions," p. 40.

[32] Ibid, p. 30ff; Voltmer, "Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans," p. 11f.

[33] Rhodes, *Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans*, p. 28.

4.3   Absence of Coordination

The literature on international media assistance stresses that donor coordination is a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of the whole media sector.[34] Especially when many diverse organizations and programmes operate in parallel, effective donor coordination is key to creating synergies, to dividing labour corresponding to the capacities and to preventing duplication.[35] In some Western Balkan countries, there were attempts to improve the transparency and coordination of international media assistance:

- In 2005, the Albanian Government created the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination, which inter alia also gathered data on international media assistance.
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the early period of media assistance efforts, the OHR convened regular bi-weekly roundtables with all major donors and maintained a database of donor projects.
- In the high phase of international media assistance to the Kosovo, the country study notes some donor coordination at the policy level regarding general principles, but at the operational level, concerned with specific activities and projects, coordination was barely perceptible.

The impact of these endeavours was, however, very limited, not least because donor organizations' decision-making preceded transparency and coordination, which essentially precludes a common strategy. Taken together, the mention of parallel efforts noted in the country studies amounts to an impressive testimony to the symptomatic absence of meaningful coordination mechanisms during the crucial face of media reforms and institution building in the Western Balkans. More frequently, implicit coordination occurred when an international actor launched an initiative which factually demarcated its lead on the issue. Issue based coordination occurred for example during the early support of the independent media network ANEM in Serbia and as a by-product of the involvement of the same international organizations in the construction of an independent media supervisory authority in Albania. What is of concern are accounts of donor competition that were noted in the country studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. In the latter case, donors supported three concurring radio networks linking minority communities.[36]

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[34]   Price, Davis Noll and De Luce, *Mapping Media Assistance*, p. 53; Rhodes, *Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans*, p. 10.

[35]   Rhodes, *Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans*, ibid.

[36]   Reflecting earlier findings, cf. Eric Martin, "Media Reform and Development in Bosnia: An Interorganizational Account of the Media Issues Group," *South East European Journal of Economics and Business* 6, no. 1(2011), p. 92.

If there is a lesson to be learned, it is that international organizations which provide media assistance should adopt and adhere to a code of conduct that formulates best practices, such as transparency and a coordinated approach, in addition to locally contextualised commitments to specific hallmarks of the emerging local media system. Consequent media assistance has to interlace the policy and the operational levels with an aim to create system-wide synergies and actions that reinforce local media institutions.

4.4 Conditionality Mechanisms

In international development and democratization, conditionality describes a mechanism by which states implement measures of their own accord in order to conform with international obligations or standards that are prerequisite for memberships in international organizations and in order to qualify for international aid. Contrary to measures being imposed externally, conditionality holds the advantage that legislation is passed by local authorities, which would seem to guarantee local ownership and deliberation from the outset. As a practice of international media assistance, the country studies identified conditionality as an important driver to instigate media reforms in the countries of the Western Balkans in order to accede to the Council of Europe and ultimately the EU. The country reports are illustrative of the outstanding leverage the stabilization and association process that governs EU relations with Western Balkan countries has had.[37]

In this context, the five Western Balkan countries under study have to fulfil a range of media specific commitments in their pursuit to guarantee freedom of expression and to bring the countries' legislation in line with the EU *acquis.* This entails issuing an EU compliant legal framework for the media sector and constituting legislation for key media institutions, i.e. the independent national media supervisory authority and the public service media organization. As a democratic quality, media and regulatory independence has to be assured and protected. The annual progress reports highlight fairly concordant issues with the independence of the local media supervisory authority and the public service organization. As a representative for the Western Balkans, the Albanian country study holds that: "conditionality mechanisms have so far failed to ensure absence of political and financial pressures on the key media institutions."[38] Notwithstanding its success in transposing European values and EU compliant normative frameworks in the

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[37] For Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo which are governed under international protectorate the role of the EU has increased proportionately with the diminishing role of the OHR and UNMIK, respectively.

[38] Londo, "Limited Assistance for Limited Impact", p. 53.

countries of the Western Balkans, EU conditionality has had limited effect on their implementation and on converging formal arrangements with local practices.

Another caveat is that EU conditionality is most prescriptive when it comes to the transposition of the EU *acquis*, ie. media-specific legislation by the EU. Yet, the competences of the EU in the media sphere are heavily curtailed and consequently EU media legislation primarily focuses on the freedom to provide services within the internal market. The EU *aquis* is mute when it comes to the organization of public service broadcasting, ie. a prerogative of the member states, and remains superficial at best regarding the independence of media supervisory authorities. The central piece of EU media legislation, the 2008 Audiovisual Media Services Directive, addresses issues of media convergence that may be more pressing in the old member states but less meaningful and rather distracting for Western Balkan accession and candidate countries, which have to absolve democratic media transition and media institution building first. As a result, EU conditionality in the media sector often does not set the right priorities for local media systems, such as promoting transparency of media funding and ownership or safeguarding the independence of the local media supervisory authority and the public service media organization, among others. By contrast, the need to issue EU compliant legislation has been used to introduce new control mechanisms, for example in relation to new and online media, or has provided the pretext for yet another reform of the media supervisory authority.

While conditionality is widely used to influence public policy at the normative level, it seems that international media assistance in Western Balkan countries at the operational level did not effectively condition funds to non-state actors by, for example, requiring beneficiaries to demonstrate compliance with media self-regulation as well as to contribute to media supporting institutions, such as professional associations. Harnessing conditionality in the private sector can develop into a promising vehicle to achieve media system-wide effects beyond the single beneficiary and "cultivate" media professionalism.

4.5   Grappling with Local Media Economics

Local media economics, which are described above as particularly challenging, turned out to severely affect the efforts invested into the democratic transformation of Western Balkan local media systems. For a variety of reasons international media assistance to the Western Balkan countries failed to reduce the overreliance of local media on (potentially compromising) subsidies and more broadly to adequately address the economic sustainability of media outlets in print and broadcasting, as well as self-regulatory bodies and supporting institutions. There are several raisons for this, notably:

1. the disregard for local media economics and economic sustainability;
2. the dismissal of measures to structure media markets; and
3. the fact that aid can also provoke artificial demand locally.

The first and most obvious reason for this is an initial total disregard for the fact that in many situations local media markets are too weak to sustain conventional media business models that rely on selling advertising and/ or subscriptions in order to take foothold. This phenomenon is now recognized in the literature on international media assistance in the Western Balkans, according to which economic sustainability is too often simply implied where business models do not correspond to market realities and - even where this was considered - the overall deteriorating economic situation endangered what was earlier viable media business.[39] While building capacity in media management and diversification of business models was added at a later stage to the menus of professional trainings this could not reverse the overall trend that for the time being there is extremely little business with media in the region.

Second, liberalization of local media markets featured high on the agendas for international media assistance and was reinforced by a very liberal interpretation of open media market access as a tenet of exercising freedom of expression. This has arguably augmented oversaturation of local media markets because structural measures did not find favour with the international community.[40] Instead there has been a false reliance on the cleansing effect of market forces, which was thought to lead to consolidation and competition on the merits of journalistic quality and innovation.[41] The overall confused funding practice during international media assistance has further contributed to the congestion of local media markets, as is very well portrayed in the Kosovar country study.

This leads to the third and last issue – that the international financing of media operations is an additional source of revenue that can become the objective for local media. Development literature recognises that aid functions similar to a market and can provoke artificial demands from beneficiaries locally. Without attempting to devaluate the objectives of international media assistance what emerges from the country reports of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia is that during its peak too many local media outlets could access funding for their operational activities from a large diversity of international donors, only to collapse

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[39] Cf. Rhodes, *Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans*, p. 19; Petra Sorge, "Media in Kosovo – Long Walk to Modernity," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 52, no. 4(2012), p. 42; Johnson, "Model Interventions," p. 29f.

[40] Cf. Sorge, "Media in Kosovo – Long Walk to Modernity," p. 36.

[41] Friederike Von Franqué, "The Other Frontier: Media Assistance by International Organizations," in *Media in the Enlarged Europe: Politics, Policy and Industry*, ed. Alec Charles (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2009), p. 94.

again when the funding dried out[42]. Instead of instigating commercial media, what was often fostered was a symbiosis between international media assistance and their local project partners that did not bring economic sustainability. This finding extends to the numerous supporting institutions that were intended to institute media self-regulatory bodies and professional associations, and even to some extent to the media watchdogs. Without donor coordination and media assistance based on realistic assumptions about the economic viability of media organizations and corresponding funds over a time horizon adequate for institution building, the international media assistance in the Western Balkans was characterized by numerous primature exits of donors which negatively influenced the outlook of such assistance projects.

4.6   Local Contextualisation and Deliberation

In the presence of international development and assistance, efforts invested in building democratic institutions in transitional settings are contingent upon local acceptance and the fit of the imported models. This is the reason why building effective media institutions can be seen as a function between domestic demand and external influence that is discernible from the level of confrontation or partnership during their introduction and the ongoing levels of local support and acceptance. It is therefore valid to emphasize the process of introducing institutions over their content and formal provisions.[43]

Many examples from the country studies provide evidence that international media assistance in the Western Balkans was conscious of the principal need to work closely with local stakeholders and to align media reforms with the local context. Such was the case in Albania where the 1998 Law on Public and Private Radio and Television was drafted by a parliamentary commission in collaboration with a local expert group and the help of international expertise.[44] The Macedonian Broadcasting Law from 1997 is also cited "as an exemplary form of cooperation between international bodies [and donors] and the Macedonian authorities."[45] Yet, in many situations the very purpose of the deliberation, i.e. customizing legislation to the socio-political and cultural context as well as raising local acceptance, was not fully achieved, though for very different reasons:

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[42]   Illustrative is the OBN case study in Jušić and Ahmetašević "Media Reforms through Intervention," p. 43f. However, there are some notable exception, cf. the case study on radio and TV B92 in Serbia in Marko, "Media Reforms in Turbulent Times," p. 42f.

[43]   Cf. for effective legal institutions Daniel Berkowitz, Katharina Pistor and Jean-Francois Richard, "The Transplant Effect", *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 51, no. 1(2003), p. 178f.

[44]   Londo, "Limited Assistance for Limited Impact", p. 27.

[45]   Price, Davis Noll and De Luce, *Mapping Media Assistance*, p. 57.

- European media values and institutions pervaded local stakeholders' deliberations and little consideration was given to their meaningful interpretation or to measures that would compensate for a lack of tradition that would, for example, sustain formally independent media institutions, i.e. the media supervisory authority and the public service broadcasting organization.

- Occasionally, international consultants dominated deliberations providing expertise which did not correspond to local circumstances, interests or organizational cultures, as evidenced by the unaccomplished organizational reform of the public service broadcasting organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina[46] or the much criticised study of the European Union on the Serbian media.[47]

- Contrary to good government practices, while international expertise is invited in some situations local governments did not properly consult draft laws or, when they did so, neglected consultation outcomes leaving local stakeholders no venue to influence the policy making process. This is exposed in the Serbian country study with regard to the Public Information Law, as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina where local expertise was, in quite a few cases, not invited.

- Every so often, well intentioned initiatives to construct media supporting institutions, such as professional organizations and self-regulatory bodies, were welcomed by local stakeholders who failed to support them in practice, as was the case, for example, with the Council of Ethics in Albania.

- Probably a reflection of the rather weak role of civil society, media as a public interest goal did not permeate well the concerns of the society at large, which is well illustrated by the rather dispassionate relationship between the societies of the Western Balkans and their public service media .

Entirely different was the situation in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo where the OHR and UNMIK used their powers to institute media legislation and institutions at a time when these modern states were still under construction, and later due to legislative stalemate by local governments. While some of the so created media institutions functioned reasonably well under the international protectorate, such as the independent supervisory authority CRA in Bosnia and Herzegovina, local politics remains a real and lingering threat. Moreover, the case study delineating the establishment of a system of public service broadcasting in

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[46]   That was modelled after the UK equivalent BBC, cf. Jusić and Ahmetašević, "Media Reforms through Intervention", p. 34.

[47]   Marko, "Media Reforms in Turbulent Times," p. 25f.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an account of local resistance that was overruled by a series of OHR decisions, important elements of which are to date not effective.[48]

4.7 Minority Media and the Inter-Ethnic Mediated Public Sphere

One priority of international media assistance which still continues during the phasing-out of international media assistance is support to minority media. In multi-ethnic countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia international donors have been supporting underrepresented people and minorities in the media to launch media outlets, such as print publications, local radio and sometimes TV programmes, in their language and for their constituency. Determining the appropriate strategy to promote minority media while preserving an integrated local media sphere appears to be particularly challenging. As it is well captured in the Macedonian country study this may cement into an ethnically divided media sphere and the danger that this spirals into ethnically biased reporting and polarisation.[49] In addition, Serbia's "media content reflects political divisions within society, as well as ethnical and territorial divisions."[50]

Moreover, in public service media international assistance did not discourage ethnically motivated divisions and spheres of influence, frustrating later efforts to foster an inter-ethnic national identity and dialogue mediated by an integrated media sphere. Subsequent attempts to promote adjustment to the of public service media in particular faced enormous difficulties because it would endanger the already acquired positions of control and influence (see for example the case studies on the local public service broadcaster in the country reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia). Thus, the focus of international media assistance should always be to support public institutions and structures that could effectively facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue in a country in addition to serving specific constituencies.

4.8 International Monitoring

In addition to local efforts, international media assistance has an important role to play in monitoring the state of democratic media transformation and media

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[48] Jusić and Ahmetašević, "Media Reforms through Intervention," p. 35f.

[49] Dimitrijevska-Markoski and Daskalovski, "Assisting Media Democratization after Low-Intensity Conflict," p. 21f.

[50] Marko, "Media Reforms in Turbulent Times," p. 19.

institution building in the countries of the Western Balkans. From the outset there was no shortage of international monitoring tackling the media sector or specific media institutions, such as the legal frameworks, the media supervisory authority and the public service media organizations. Albeit with different foci, regular reports are produced - the European Commission's annual progress reports for the Western Balkan countries, the IREX Media Sustainability Index and reports by Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House. Other international actors engage in ad hoc monitoring, especially the Council of Europe and the OSCE, among others.

Probably the most influential, the European Commission's annual progress reports cover the media as an aspect of guaranteeing freedom of expression and media institutions within the policy on information society and the media. Relative to its scope, the report has to be very concise on these issues and it does not amount to detailed monitoring. The Serbian country reports offer an illustrative example of the general nature of this exercise.[51] For Macedonia it is noted that criticism from the EU attracts the widest public attention, but repeated concerns in the progress reports have not been sufficient to bring about change.[52]

In substance, international monitoring too often questions formal arrangements but pays too little attention to the implementation of media reforms and the informal practices that are equally decisive for the functioning of media institutions. In spite of the prevailing diplomacy there must be clues as to who is accountable, what concrete action is required to improve a situation, and who is responsible to take action. It is also important that international media assistance defends the principles of media freedom and critically engages with its own theoretical concepts. Contrary to the widespread practice of assessing progress against benchmarks that presuppose a consolidated democracy, it would be more useful to assess the risks to local media freedoms and independent media institutions.

International monitoring is not an end in itself and requires diplomatic follow-up and, when necessary, political pressure. A good example is the international scrutiny over attempts to interfere with the independence of the media supervisory authority, CRA, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[53] In addition to the actions taken by the OHR, other key international actors regularly issued warnings and protest letters to the local government in order to voice concrete concerns over the independence of the regulator. Now that international pressure has weakened, the CRA is facing many attempts at political capture.[54] In other Western Balkan countries international media assistance has not used its political leverage systematically in an effort to protect key media institutions from political interference.

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[51]   Ibid, p. 34.

[52]   Dimitrijevska-Markoski and Daskalovski, "Assisting Media Democratization after Low-Intensity Conflict," p. 32.

[53]   Jusić and Ahmetašević, "Media Reforms through Intervention," p. 32f.

[54]   Ibid.

5.

Achievements and Pitfalls of Media Democratization

The following cross-national comparison of the achievements and pitfalls of democratic media transition in the five Western Balkan countries is used to examine the role and influence of international media assistance and conditionality.

5.1 Media freedoms and European best practices

In all five countries there is a common high level of **formal compliance** of local media laws and institutions with European best practices issued by the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the EU that can be attributed to their involvement during the legislative process. For the two countries that underwent media intervention, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Kososvo, the international protectorate charged the OSCE directly with drafting or even instituting local media laws. But the international community also provided expertise, consultation and evaluations of draft media laws in Albania, Macedonia, and Serbia, to the effect that these laws adhere to European best practices. For example, in many aspects the governing legislation for the independent media supervisory authorities would excel those of old EU member states. But to what effect?

Such media policy transfer would be a very impressive result of international media assistance in the Western Balkan region were these laws effectively implemented and complied with. However, with only a handful of exceptions, the country studies reveal that there is a general mismatch between the quality of the legislation and its practical consequences, which is explained by a general implementation deficit that in some cases results from deliberate obstruction by local elites.[55] Nonetheless, there are achievements that ought to be recognised, in particular that countries of the Western Balkans now have a pluralistic media landscape, broadcast licensing has confined the previous chaos in the ether, regulation effectively condemns hate speech, and the media and journalists are no longer criminalised for alleged defamation, among others.[56] All of this, to different

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[55]   Cf. Rhodes, *Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans*, p. 12, 27.

[56]   Ibid, p. 28; Cf. Londo, "Limited Assistance for Limited Impact," p. 50.

degrees, has been influenced by international media assistance in the pursuit of bringing to life the universal value of freedom of expression and infusing European best practices in media regulation and institutions.

Beyond the progress noted there are a number of arguments why formal arrangements that outperform their local context should not be defied. Are not such discrepancies characteristic for countries in the process of democratic transition? As representative of the other countries, in the case study on Serbia, Davor Marko notes that the transposition of European standards for the media can "set the path for the Serbian media transition, and help international actors to externally monitor and observe the degree of transition."[57] While it is not wrong to emphasize the development path, however, it does not suffice to rely on media institutions that have democratic potential encoded in their institutional design.[58] A normative framework alone cannot entrench against capture and informality, in particular the worrying tendency in Western Balkan countries for media, politics and business to form an **iron triangle**, i.e a self-enforcing power structure serving local, albeit sometimes competing, elites. Nonetheless, formal guarantees are crucial to prevent even more blatant attempts to deputize media; they should be invoked by individuals and media advocates to defend local media institutions and, in principle, they keep the marketplace of ideas open.

5.2   Top-down versus Bottom-up

Western Balkan countries have different track-histories when it comes to media institution building, but also within a country some sub-systems appear to flow easier through transition than others. When comparing the experiences across all five countries, it emerges that top-down legal reforms are at face value comparatively easier to accomplish than bottom-up initiatives.

Typical examples for top-down media institutions are the establishment of a media supervisory authority or issuing media legislation, but with mixed results in practice (see below). These findings are amplified whenever media reforms take place in the presence of international custody such as earlier in Bosnia and Herzegovina or in Kosovo. In both countries, initial media reforms were fast-tracked or were issued entirely under international authority, for example the media decrees issued by the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[59] With domestication and local ownership the initial headway of top-down media institution building in countries undergoing media intervention (such

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[57]   Marko, "Media Reforms in Turbulent Times," p. 50.

[58]   Jakubowicz and Sükösd, "Twelve Concepts Regarding Media System Evolution and Democratization in Post-Communist Societies," p. 12.

[59]   See for a complete list Jusić and Ahmetašević, "Media Reforms through Intervention."

as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) levels out compared to those countries which experienced more domestically driven changes in the media system, such as Macedonia, Albania and Serbia.

The building of media institutions bottom-up, which requires local acceptance, as is the case with membership-based s such as media self-regulation bodies, is much more time-consuming and the prospects are uncertain. Attempts to root press and journalistic self-regulation in the countries of the Western Balkans have led to the creation of institutional empty shells: For Albania, the introduction of member-based s in the media has been by and large unsuccessful. In Macedonia, press outlets and groups of journalists do not subscribe to the authority of the Council of Honour that was charged with defending media ethics. In Kosovo, the OCSE attempt to set-up a journalists association in 2000 failed, while subsequent self-regulatory bodies never became self-sustainable. Despite the 2006 Code of Ethics and the Press Council, institutionalized self-regulation remains weak in Serbia. Hence, the experience of supporting media institutions is fairly similar in all the countries studied in the framework of this research project; that is, with very few exceptions they do not (yet) root in the local media systems. Notable exemptions are a few commercial broadcasters which, after initial operational support from international donors, matured into locally accepted and sustainable ventures, such as the Serbian B92.

The transformation of state broadcasters to public service broadcasting and media s bears characteristics of both because their inception is based on a top-down legal reform but their success nevertheless rests on acceptance by the local population as well as stakeholders. The experiences with public service broadcasting institutions in the five Western Balkan countries show that achievements at the formal level do not automatically guarantee their independence and the fulfilment of the public service mission. Without exception public service media s are perceived as government friendly media and newly elected governments rush to institute their influence over the management and the content of these institutions. Moreover, as examples in Macedonia show, local constituencies do not easily accept funding their public service broadcasting with a license fee, which is unlikely to change in the short term even were the programmes of better journalistic quality and of objective and more diverse reporting.

5.3   Implementation and Domestication: (Re)politicization of Media Institutions

Across the region, it emerges that in addition to the sizeable implementation deficit and the culture of informality eroding democratic institutions there is a new and rather open tendency to (re)politicize public media institutions. These issues are mutually reinforcing and pose a very serious threat to democratic media transition and media institution building in the Western Balkan countries.

At the time when international media assistance was phasing out, local and international observers recognised a growing political saliency of media, policy and regulation. "As soon as foreign donors withdrew their (financial and practical) support the newly implemented institutions dwindle or are being hijacked by particularistic interests."[60] After 2010, international reports documented the dramatic deterioration in the Macedonian media sphere, which has even led to the re-intensifying of international media assistance.[61]

The trade-offs between local ownership and democratic media transition are most visible in public service media reforms and with independent media supervisory authorities, both raising critical issues in relation to the **actual independence** of the organizations. The deadlock when appointments of decision-makers to media supervisory authorities or the public service media are due serves as an illustration. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo years can pass by without the elected politicians making effective appointments because such decisions are highly politicised. Likewise, these media institutions are exposed to post-electoral vulnerabilities when every new government in power attempts to change legislation in order to influence the composition of the boards and senior management. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo initial progress during international media intervention has been partially off-set during the subsequent process of domestication, i.e. when ownership, control and oversight over local media institutions was handed-back to local stakeholders. In Kosovo, "the issue of political interference in media institutions has intensified following "Kosovarization".[62] In Bosnia and Herzegovina, government increasingly ignores international criticisms over the independence of the regulatory authority CRA.[63] Public service media's dependency on the state budget, as highlighted in Serbia and Kosovo, can equally be used to leverage political influence.

It would be too early to assume that in the Western Balkan countries these alarming trends have already consolidated into hybrid or "atavistic" media systems in which the imported European media models are irreversibly tweaked by political parallelism. International media assistance should accept the political nature of media policy when formulating responses that are sensitive to local interests and positive incentives that would ensure political support locally. International media assistance is crucially needed to accompany the process of localization and domestication of local key media institutions with expertise and international scrutiny. International monitoring should place renewed focus on the implementation of media reforms and focus more closely on local practices. EU

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[60] Voltmer, "Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans," p. 14.

[61] Dimitrijevska-Markoski and Daskalovski, "Assisting Media Democratization after Low-Intensity Conflict," p. 30.

[62] Miftari, "Starting from Scratch," p. 48.

[63] Jusić and Ahmetašević, "Media Reforms through Intervention," p. 34f.

conditionality and diplomatic efforts must work together when promoting media freedoms, policy stability and credible media reform in these countries.

By contrast, business parallelism is nurtured by local media economics and the lack of transparency, and above all is perfectly legal. In private media where owners and editors - albeit constrained economically - are free to define their editorial line political allegiances and partisan reporting have increased. Media policy can however provide incentives for the production of quality content and the dissemination of news and current affairs. Instead of contributing to the operational costs of mainstream media, and in addition to stimulating minority media, international media assistance could place new emphasis on investigatory journalism, quality content production and sharing, as well as facilitate access to European audiovisual content.

5.4 Non-transparent Media

Similar to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the media sectors of Western Balkan countries are characterized by fuzzy ownership, which describes a situation in which transparency about media owners and their interests is lacking. Fuzzy ownership is more complex than understanding who owns which media. Ilda Londo summarizes for Albania that media owners and moguls are "persons with economic interests in other businesses, lacking media experience and with little transparency of their media funding practices."[64] More direct transparency concerning media ownership and funding would be crucial therefore in order to expose the rampant cross-subsidization to media outlets as well as partisan public sector funding and procurement of media services.

Throughout the democratic media transition in the Western Balkans there has been no systematic effort to gather and release economic indicators about local media markets, such as operating budgets of media outlets, advertising, subscription and sales revenues, subsidies and public funds. The country report of Albania notes the lack of reliable data on the media and the very sketchy evidence available. If local policy-makers, but also international media assistance, are not informed how can it be possible to devise optimal and evidence-based policies? By the same token, transparency of international media assistance should also be strengthened.

Hence, the **failure to promote transparency** across all aspects of media governance, especially with regard to ownership and the financing of media operations in addition to procedural requirements, should be considered a crucial omission of international media assistance. The same applies to transfers of the state and of state-owned companies to any media outlet, no matter whether this

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[64]   Londo, "Limited Assistance for Limited Impact," p. 16.

is in exchange for media services or by way of public subsidies. The reason for this blind spot is easy to pinpoint: neither the *acquis* of the Council of Europe nor the European Union provides for the introduction of such far reaching transparency and procedural requirements. So far, at the European and EU level there are only non-binding instruments[65] and attempts to introduce transparency of media ownership in Serbia, for example, were met with fierce resistance by private media.

5.5 Internal Culture of Independence through Good Governance Practices

Through an internal culture of independence the resilience of media organizations in the public and the private sector can to a certain extent be strengthened, even in an environment that is not fully enabling, as is the case in the countries of the Western Balkans.[66] Especially in the public sector, a public service culture that embraces the tenets of good governance is believed to improve the overall performance and public standing of key media institutions. Transparency of decision-making, participatory deliberations and accountability are important non-media-specific ingredients for a public service culture that would ultimately foster an internal culture of independence at the local media supervisory authority and the public service media organization. Unfortunately, European best practices that are binding in the media sector do not tie in with good governance practices, although as a value they are promoted throughout international media assistance.

Selectively, international media assistance flagged the role of transparency and accountability, which has promoted some change, e.g. by infusing more transparency in the work of the Macedonian media supervisory authority. Another successful element is the integration of local media supervisory authorities into European networks of peer institutions, e.g. the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA). In another situation, however, the offer to improve the Albanian media supervisory authority's accounting system was not met with interest. International media assistance can help build the internal culture of independence through trainings, and international monitoring could be better attuned to assess good governance practices.

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[65] Specifically, Council of Europe, Resolution 1636 (2008) of the Parliamentary Assembly on Indicators for Media in a Democracy (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, October 3, 2008), para. 8.18-19; Cf. Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation 94(13) on Measures to Promote Media Transparency (Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, November 22, 1994); European Parliament, Resolution of 25 September 2008 on Concentration and Pluralism in the Media in the European Union (Brussels: European Parliament, September 25, 2008).

[66] Cf. Council of Europe, Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Independence and Functions of Regulatory Authorities for the Broadcasting Sector (Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, March 26, 2008).

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Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The effects of international media assistance accompanying the democratic transformation of the media in Western Balkan countries is highly constrained by the local context. The experiences of international media assistance in the region suggest that imported solutions have not been very cognitive in all aspects of local conditions; for example, neglecting media economics in these very small markets, and also in regard to the ability of media supporting institutions to govern themselves. International responses to the political saliency of media policy and media institutions have been rather schematic when prescribing independent institutions as regulators and in public service media. The promoted media reforms did not harness much needed transparency of media ownership and funding, and lacked strategic approaches to promote media policy stability and to keep close tabs on credible media reform and implementation.

In the Western Balkan countries surveyed, the transformation of the media systems and their subsystems has not been linear; all transformation cases studied have experienced retrograde processes and a sliding back after the external push for change weakened. Today, democratic media transition in the surveyed countries is stagnating at a comparative level and in some of them the situation may deteriorate further, e.g. Macedonia. Sustainable and functioning media institutions are hard to come by because most of them are re-politicized or at least vulnerable in their dependence on external resources or political cues. We conclude that a decade of international media assistance of varying intensity is not sufficient to construct media institutions when for their proper functioning they have to outperform their local context. In the mid-term, the introduced media institutions and policies will largely depend on the development of the political culture in the five studied countries – an uncertain and slow process of systemic change.[67] The present state of affairs is that locally driven international media assistance will be needed for the foreseeable future to counterbalance politicization and partisanship in the media.

In addition, our cross-national comparison of key media institutions in the Western Balkan countries suggests that – aside from short term affects - scaling international media assistance does not necessarily improve outcomes. However, it

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[67] Jakubowicz and Sükösd, "Twelve Concepts Regarding Media System Evolution and Democratization in Post-Communist Societies," pp. 22-23.

seems that those societies and institutions that received a stronger push through external assistance or even direct intervention were able to 'travel' faster and further than those that were primarily driven by domestic, endogenous drives for change. However, the institutions that were reformed more radically and rapidly due to external assistance witnessed a fiercer backlash once they were integrated into the local legal and institutional context, after the external assistance was reduced.

To a certain extent, the loss of international media assistance effectiveness is also self-afflicted due to a number of shortcomings, most importantly the lack of coordination among donors and the absence of a long-term strategy adequate for institution-building. From a normative point of view, the exported media model is a patchwork: European best practices are a compilation of binding and non-binding instruments of the Council of Europe and the OSCE as well as the EU *acquis.* As it stands, scattered international competences and the self-referentiality of the international system do their part to undermine a consistent and coherent approach that would be reinforcing at the normative and implementation levels. The EU conditionality mechanisms are still a very strong incentive for Western Balkan regimes to continue media reforms and institution building, however they do not practically implement formally accepted arrangements. Thus, while at the formal level the introduction of European best practices and key media institutions has apparently succeeded, there is a growing sense of urgency to improve implementation and effectiveness before the locally specific mismatch between form and substance consolidates into hybrid and atavistic media systems.

This research into democratic media transition in five Western Balkan countries in the presence of international media assistance and conditionality backs a number of policy recommendations which address policies in support of democratic media transition and international media assistance respectively.

Transparency

Promoting transparency should enable local stakeholders and the international community to better assess and evaluate local media markets and assistance needs and provide a basis for enhanced coordination among themselves.

a. For countries which undergo democratic transition, transparency becomes a central requirement for media development at public and private levels, including all state funding in support of public service and private media, public procurement of media services by the state and state owned companies, as well as media ownership and financing of media operations. Policy making processes should be transparent and inclusive for local stakeholders and the public.

b. When entering the phase of media reforms and institution building, the international community should make transparency conditional upon receiving external funds and promote it vigorously in media policy-making

while contributing with their own practices to this end. In particular, international media assistance should make all significant funding and actions transparent and help establish a single public registry to which this information is submitted.

Policy consistency and stability

In the phase of media reforms and institution building, local stakeholders and the international community should contribute to consistent media policy objectives and jointly foster a healthy degree of policy stability.

a. International media assistance that influences local media policy and institution building should reinforce local media policy objectives corresponding to international best practices, while remaining flexible to accommodate different strategies and funding priorities at the operational level.

b. International media assistance should aim to enhance the political commitment to local media legislation and key media institutions corresponding to international best practices, as well as identify strategies to limit post-electoral political vulnerabilities and deadlocks concerning key media institutions.

c. International media assistance and EU conditionality should reduce external demands for legislative reforms that unnecessarily unsettle media policy stability.

d. International media assistance should address local needs as they arise but maintain an outlook and strategy adequate for media institution building and subsequent consolidation.

Contextual integrity and local ownership

In the phase of media reforms and institution building, international media assistance should aim for optimal contextual integrity that recognizes local political and economic circumstances and facilitates local ownership of media reforms and institutions.

a. International media assistance should be attuned to country-specific media economics, refrain from distorting local media markets and be considerate of the economic repercussions of aid.

b. International media assistance should not phase out during the process of localization and domestication of local key media institutions but accompany this process strategically, such as by continuously providing expertise and international scrutiny.

Implementation and compliance

International media assistance should pay more attention to the implementation of local media reforms and compliance with formal arrangements.

a. Already at the stage of policy formulation positive incentives should be considered that would ensure political and professional support locally for the implementation of legal frameworks and the operation of key media institutions.

b. Local policy-makers should be assisted in devising implementation strategies and accountability mechanisms with clearly defined roles and deliverables.

c. International media assistance can play an important role in strengthening an internal culture of independence and promoting professional ethics as well as connecting key media institutions with European and/ or international peer networks.

Progress evaluation and international scrutiny

Systematic and continuous progress evaluations and international scrutiny should accompany democratic media transition and should inform EU conditionality mechanisms, international relations and international media assistance alike.

a. In additional to formal scrutiny, discrepancies between formal guarantees and actual practices should also be followed up diplomatically and trigger political consequences that do not weaken the local media system.

b. International monitoring and progress evaluation should be detailed and allow for contextual interpretation of local developments; it should assess risks to media freedoms and independence corresponding to international best practices instead of measuring progress against benchmarks from media theory and Western democracies.

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