



2nd Academy on Media Law in South East Europe

Sarajevo, 3-5 September 2013

Opening address by Gazmend Turdiu, Head of Expert Pool, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is my pleasure to be here with you today at the opening of the second edition of the **Academy on Media Law in South East Europe**.
- I am very happy that this Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) initiative has been recognized by renowned media law experts from the region as well as by our partners: **Friedrich Ebert Foundation, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, OSCE field operations in South East Europe, European Broadcasting Union, European Association of Public Service Media in South East Europe, ARTICLE 19, and US Embassy in Sarajevo** – who have all made the event possible.
- Our special thanks go to **Boyko Boev** from ARTICLE 19, who has been instrumental in developing the Academy idea together with the RCC.
- The RCC mission is to promote mutual cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration of South East Europe in order to inspire development in the region to the benefit of its people.
- This is why the strategic goal of the media development work of the RCC Secretariat is to bring about a change which would foster transition and development of the media sector in South East Europe towards free and professional media in the region.

- Media legislation sets the framework for the media to develop. The process of drafting it requires that legislators, but also civil society, do their best to make the media serve the citizens. And for this to happen, a dialogue and cooperation between the governmental and the non-governmental sector must be established and well-functioning. Supporting deepening of this dialogue on a regional level is what the **RCC had in mind when deciding to launch the Academy in Zagreb last year.**
- The Academy seeks to respond to common challenges concerning media freedom in the region, as we believe that the good practices in one country can serve as a model or inspiration for reforming the media regulation in the other countries in the region.
- And since media lawyers and law practitioners in South East Europe share many fundamental challenges and therefore can share and learn from each others' experiences, building a network of media lawyers and law practitioners with a common strategy is one of the ways to successfully address the challenges which the media in South East Europe face today.
- The RCC and its Secretariat recognize the indispensable role the media have in building a free, democratic, pluralistic, tolerant and inclusive society, as well as the challenges they face in fulfilling that role. There can be no healthy democracy without a healthy, pluralistic, professional media sector.
- Three years ago, **the RCC Secretariat and the EBU for the first time brought together public broadcasters, government officials, regulators and experts** from South East Europe to an international conference in Sarajevo. The conference participants agreed that the region's public service media should become the engines of technological, economic, political, and cultural development of their countries, supporting integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, and development of regional cooperation.
- In line with the conclusions of this conference, a follow-up meeting, **in Novi Vinodolski in November 2010, established the European Association of Public Service Media in South East Europe**, as a non-profit professional body of the public service media in the region. Its establishment was supported by the RCC.

- We are glad that the Association has taken concrete steps in this direction, illustrated in 2011 at the premises of the RCC Secretariat in Sarajevo, by the signature of a **Protocol on Regional Cooperation in Education and Training** among its 12 members.
- In 2012, and as a result of a **joint EBU/RCC advocacy**, the EU has recognized these efforts and awarded a **five-year partnership agreement to the EBU** for the purpose of enabling the democratic role of public service media in countries covered by the EU enlargement policy.
- More recently, the RCC Secretariat has also advocated that a regional documentary coproduction on the theme ‘How do I see my neighbour’ within the ‘Strengthening the RCC Secretariat’ project be implemented by the Association. The overall project has been implemented by the Central European Initiative and financed by the European Commission. The documentaries were aired at public service broadcasters across the region in spring this year. The purpose is to stimulate understanding and dialogue, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- A key **RCC role is to pool together best resources of our region** around the same, common goal, to maximize knowledge, impact and avoid duplication, at the same time serving as a link to the European Union and other interested partners of the region.
- The membership perspective offered by the EU Enlargement Strategy provides a strong incentive for all of South East Europe. It devotes significant attention to freedom of expression in the media, with a particular consideration paid to a need to improve the economic standing and autonomy of public service media in order for them to fulfill their role.
- The **European Commission has also recognized the value of the Academy**, and decided to support it both on policy level through its report on media and freedom of expression in Western Balkans and Turkey, released in April this year, and financially, **by designating funds for its functioning in the next three years, through the RCC’s budget** – for which we are extremely grateful.

Dear experts,

- In the field of the media, **the law is the basis**, the foundation in safeguarding the freedom of expression, as a fundamental human right and a *conditio sine qua non* of a healthy democracy.
- I am thus confident that you will use this week to **identify common problems and solutions, and make concrete expert proposals** for the legislators and decision-makers that will help them in guaranteeing this fundamental right.
- Finally, **I call on the legislators to use the knowledge of the experts from our region** in addressing media law issues, so that the best possible solutions are found at all times when it comes to European media standards, to the benefit of our citizens who righteously expect that from us.
- On the RCC part, we will keep working with the European Commission, the Association and all interested partners in supporting a key role of the media in South East European societies.
- We look forward to continuing to work with all of you. I wish us all a successful 2nd edition of the Academy on Media Law in South East Europe.
- Thank you.