



SECRETARIAT

## **First Academy on Media Law in South East Europe**

4 June 2012

### **Opening address by Hido Biscevic, Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)**

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is my pleasure to be here with you today at the opening of the first academy on media law in South East Europe.
- I am very happy that this initiative has been recognized by renowned media law experts from the region as well as by our partners: the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Association of Public Service Media in South East Europe and ARTICLE 19 – who have all made the event possible.
- As you know, the RCC mission is to promote mutual cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration of South East Europe in order to accelerate 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.
- Needless to say, this is becoming increasingly important as the media have played a particular role in the transitional environment within our societies.

- They operate against the background of broader social and political developments in the region and, in many cases, influence them, for better or for worse.
- And, talking about this broader context, one needs to note that regardless of oscillations in political and socio-economic conditions in South East Europe, the region is moving forward, both on its European integration path and in terms of regional cooperation.
- Challenges and problems occur on a daily basis, none of the trends are irreversible still, but in general there is a movement forward.
- The membership perspective offered by the EU Enlargement Strategy 2011-2012 provides a strong incentive for all of South East Europe. It devotes significant attention to freedom of expression in the media, with a particular attention paid to a need to improve the economic standing and autonomy of public service media in order for them to fulfill their role.
- The RCC and its Secretariat have been contributing to the advancement of this perspective. We 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.
- In this context, a brief reminder of what the RCC Secretariat has achieved in the field:
- A year and a half 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 root and developed concrete steps in this direction, illustrated in September 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. The RCC proudly facilitated this process.
- More recently, the RCC Secretariat has 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 are being prepared by the members of the Association and are expected to be finished by the end of the year. The purpose is to stimulate understanding and dialogue, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.
- In building upon the achievements made so far, the RCC is glad to back the launch of the first academy on media law in our part of the world.
- The exchange of common experience and practices, development and implementation of progressive media legislation in South East Europe is an important contribution to regional cooperation and promotion of European media standards.
- Further on, working to safeguard media freedoms and the right to freedom of expression by sharing and learning from the best legal national frameworks and practices in the enforcement of media standards in the region will create a network of media law experts as an important source of knowledge in implementing the current and drafting the future media legislation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- 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 precondition 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 guarantee 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.
- On the RCC part, we will keep working with the European Commission, the Association and 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 first academy on media law in South East Europe.
- Thank you.