

**Media conference:
“Podgorica Journalistic Forum”
Hotel Premier, 13-15 November 2014**

**Opening Address, Ambassador Janina Hrebickova
Head of OSCE Mission to Montenegro
13 November 2014, 17.00 pm**

Your excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me firstly thank the organizers of this important forum, especially to the participants, who have come from a broad range of media, working in the countries of South East Europe.

I take note of the remarks by my good colleague, Mitja Drobnic, Head of the EU Delegation. The OSCE Mission to Montenegro and the EU Delegation have a long period of engagement in the area of media, and though there are many issues, one which we have spent particular effort on - is the media self-regulation issue.

This Conference is a timely event to talk about the priorities in the media field in Montenegro, as well as the responsibilities of all involved stake holders.

Firstly, we all know that media have a big social responsibility in any democratic society, as they play a key role in shaping public opinion. Strive to reach independent and professional journalism should be alpha and omega of every democratically functioning country. While on the one side the freedom of expression should be fully respected and guarded by the state institutions, on the other side the responsible reporting should be respected, too.

What I mean by professional reporting is - journalism's first obligation to the truth and its loyalty to citizen's interests, its discipline of verification of facts, its need to serve as an independent monitor of power and its need of personal sense of ethics and responsibility—a kind of moral compass.

To have a professional and independent journalism is indeed a challenge for every country that has undergone transition, either from war to peace, from any type of undemocratic system to the democratic one.

While we all know that various efforts of different national and international stakeholders have taken place in the past years in regard the establishing and maintaining the necessary preconditions for the proper function of the media scene,

unfortunately what we have today is the situation that is quite far from what those efforts aimed at.

In recent years, and this is something that various reports, have indicated, there is a growing disregard for the Montenegrin journalists Code of Ethics, and there is an overall disrespect of the journalistic norms and standards. This trend has also been documented by a number of local and international observers and our Mission itself. These breaches in concrete terms refer to harmful reporting, violation of principle of presumption of innocence, breaches of personality rights and the rights to privacy, responsibility to protect private data and they have been the case in almost all media outlets reporting.

Journalism is about serving the needs of the society for the correct and accurate information. Journalists rely on professional discipline for verifying information. When the concept of objectivity originally evolved, it did not imply that journalists are free of bias. It called, rather, for a consistent method of testing information—a transparent approach to evidence. The method is objective, not the journalist. Seeking out multiple witnesses, disclosing as much as possible about sources, or asking various sides for comment, all signal such standards. This discipline of verification is what separates journalism from other modes of communication, such as propaganda, fiction or entertainment.

On the other side, there is a pressing need to call the state institutions and all other relevant stakeholders to ensure the necessary preconditions for the proper functioning of the media are in place, without any pressures.

The OSCE will continue to urge the authorities to address this matter, as it was the case before. Assaults against journalists are inexcusable. They endanger the democratic progress and have a chilling effect on freedom of the media, as well as the overall sense of security. The lack of a record of identifying, prosecuting and convicting the persons responsible for these assaults does not help and can contribute to a negative image when it comes to protecting freedoms of expression. Law enforcement authorities need to demonstrate they are able to investigate such cases in a timely and effective manner, and all outstanding cases of attacks on media people and outlets as on all other individuals need to be properly investigated and brought to an end. There is still long way to go until there is no impunity for similar attacks.

While we do believe that some recent steps taken, such as establishing of the Commission to monitor the activities of competent bodies revealing the past cases of assaults against journalists are good, the overall responsibility for such investigations is that of the prosecution and the law enforcement agencies. Their work has obviously to continue, investigating and re-investigating all past cases.

Furthermore, we have seen the same violation of principle of presumption of innocence, breaches of personality rights and the rights to privacy, responsibility to protect private data, on the side of the rule of law and law enforcement institutions in Montenegro.

They have primarily responsibility to balance transparency, public access to information, protection of private data, personal and official information, to guarantee

the presumption of innocence of persons accused or suspected of a crime, and to respect rights of individuals, especially of detained persons.

In addition to their obligation of bringing forward the tangible results of the investigations, the institutions need to be mindful of their obligation to effectively and efficiently communicate the information on their work to the public, through proper and professional channels.

On the other side, there are also evidences of certain media lacking an understanding of the courts and criminal legislation and the work of rule of law and law enforcement institutions in general. Particular areas of concern in this regard is the reporting based on unverified information, leading to harmful or unprofessional reporting.

Taking into account these concerns, our Mission will be very active in this field in the upcoming period, providing its support to capacity building of the rule of law and law enforcement institutions, as well as in respective training of media practitioners. Together with all of them, including the civil sector and relevant experts, we will work on strengthening the platform for public dialog on the Public Broadcasting Service.

All of these factors and challenges described are additionally amplified by the inexistence of an efficient media self-regulation body. Media self-regulation is an important tool to safeguard editorial freedom, promote quality and help to ensure credibility for media outlets. It is also a vital mechanism to warrant that the influence of the state is reduced to a minimum. Self-regulation involves a set of basic ethical rules agreed upon by the media community and it should also entail an independent mechanism for interpretation and enforcement of these rules.

In this regard the OSCE Mission will fully support and work closely in line with the most recent efforts of the OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media. The Mission, therefore, welcomes the commitment that Montenegrin media representatives made during the recent meeting in Vienna with OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, who agreed to work together on amendments to the Code of Ethics in order to help decrease and stop the recurring violations. This is why it is vital, as the first step, the participants have agreed to review and update the journalists' Code of Ethics with support of the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

To summarize, in the past years, the Mission has been assisting with the capacity building of the Montenegrin media professionals, helping the reform of the public broadcaster, improving the implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information, supporting efforts directed at protection of labour rights of journalists, facilitating public discussions of the amendments to legislation regulating media field, and so on.

We are ready to continue these efforts together with Montenegrin partners under the main motto that freedom of expression comes hand in hand with the responsibility the owners of that freedom have.

Thank you for your attention.