

**HEAD OF PRESENCE AMBASSADOR MICHEL TARRAN'S REMARKS AT
10th MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FORUM**

23 October 2024

Honourable parliamentarians, Mr. Ambassador, Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

- I am delighted to welcome you all to the 10th OSCE Media Development Forum. Over the past decade, the Forum has served as a key platform for open dialogue between Albania's media community, public institutions, and international partners. Today's gathering reflects our continued commitment to advancing media freedom and development in Albania.
- While the Albanian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, independent journalism faces some challenges. The close ties between business, politics, and media ownership are impacting the diversity and independence of news outlets. Many journalists experience job insecurity, low wages, and, in some cases, threats and intimidation. The 2023 Reporters Sans Frontières index highlights, that conflicts of interest and legal challenges remain major obstacles to media freedom in Albania.
- The OSCE Presence in Albania has long supported efforts to strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks that safeguard media independence and professionalism. Our partnership with the Audio-visual Media Authority has resulted in vital advancements, including the development of broadcasting codes that promote gender equality, counter discrimination, and address hate speech. This is part of a broader effort to align Albania's media regulations with OSCE commitments, and relevant international and European standards.
- In addition to these legal reforms, today's Forum will address a range of pressing issues, such as media capture and its impact on editorial independence. We will also discuss the safety of journalists, especially given the increasing number of lawsuits and threats directed at them. The misuse of Legal frameworks such as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation to silence critical voices is a trend we must collectively understand, discuss its implications and help journalists and others to combat it.
- A major focus of this Forum is media ownership, particularly the concentration of ownership that undermines the independence of editorial content. Independent journalism is the backbone of democracy, and we must continue to advocate for transparency in media ownership to ensure that all voices are heard. These are challenges that are not unique only to Albania, therefore we'll have the opportunity to hear from international experts attending the Forum perspectives from other countries too.
- While we place emphasis on the structural and legal challenges facing Albania's media, it is equally important to recognize the responsibility that journalists themselves bear

in maintaining professionalism, impartiality and objectivity in their reporting. Journalists have a duty to the public to provide accurate, balanced, and fact-based information. In an era of misinformation and sensationalism, their role in safeguarding the truth is vital. Upholding professional ethics, verifying sources, and resisting external pressures are essential to ensuring that journalism remains a trustworthy and credible pillar of democracy.

- The Presence has actively supported Albania's reform efforts, including contributing to the Rule of Law and Functioning of Democratic Institutions roadmaps, which outlines reforms to enhance freedom of expression and democratic institutions. These roadmap serves as a critical tool in guiding future media reforms, and today's discussions will help further refine these efforts.
- In line with recommendations from the May 2023 ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, we must also acknowledge the role that media play during election periods. The use of material produced by political parties or state authorities in news and information programs should be avoided, or at the very least, limited to exceptional cases, especially during election campaigns. When such material is aired, it is crucial that it be clearly identified as content produced by political contestants, as required by law. Enforcing sanctions for violations of these identification requirements will further ensure transparency and prevent undue influence over the media.
- We must also focus on strengthening the role of the judiciary in ensuring press freedom. Today, we will explore ways to foster better collaboration between journalists and the courts, enabling more accurate and transparent reporting on legal proceedings. This is crucial in a media environment where access to information is often restricted.
- Building on last year's discussions, the OSCE Presence is willing and remains committed to supporting the structured dialogue between Albania's institutions and its media sector. For this purpose, we avail not only the resources we have at disposal at the OSCE Presence in Albania but also from the broader set of OSCE institutions that are specialized on democratization and media affairs. We believe that this dialogue will foster a more collaborative environment where public officials and media professionals can work together to strengthen press freedom and find solutions that work in Albanian context.
- Furthermore, we aim to build on the initiative proposed at last year's Media Development Forum, highlighting the need for a platform to facilitate structured dialogue between the Albanian government and the media. Recent discussions with our international partners, the European Union Delegation in Albania and the Council of Europe, have reinforced a shared commitment to advancing this initiative, backed by the support of the government and led by local stakeholders.
- As we reflect on the progress made over the past 10 years, we must also look to the future. The discussions we have today will guide the next steps in shaping a media landscape that serves the public interest, upholds journalistic integrity, and fosters an informed, engaged society.

- The OSCE Presence stands ready to continue our support, providing expertise and resources to help Albania meet its media development goals. Together, we can ensure that Albania's media remains a pillar of democratic society, playing its crucial role in informing and empowering the public.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to our discussions today and encourage your active engagement.